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Rifle Shooter

THE UK'S BEST NEW SHOOTING MAGAZINE

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First Words image: Stephen Shepherd / CLA Game Fair
Cover image: Oliver Louven



So, the Game Fair. First, we had the sad news that it was no more. And then, rebirth! With the remarkable revelation that it might be triplets. Or even quads. The resultant confusion and date clashes has caused some dissent among the trade and the paying public. You can't blame the organisers of these new shows. They saw the void, and the subsequent opportunity, and have no doubt been working flat out to get an event secured from the moment they heard about the CLA's demise. That several have launched in a rush looks bad but was, I suspect, inevitable. I also suspect we will be down to one or two by the springtime and hopefully momentum will give us a single standout option that will be supported by the trade and the public alike.

Does a major game fair matter? Well, yes, I think it does. The CLA event was a showcase for our sport. A mainstream show attended by six-figure audiences and supported by any number of major brands from outside, as well as inside, field sports.

I've heard it described as a 'gathering of the clans', and, as we know, shooting is often very

guilty of dividing its forces, so a united front was always great to see. Word is that all of the new shows will have a renewed focus with shooting at their heart. That is good to hear. I guess it is a case of 'wait and see' at the moment, but fingers crossed for a prompt and unifying solution.

I can't quite believe I am already writing about Christmas, but it is time to make that wish list. We have a bumper products section this month with plenty of new kit to grab your attention. I recommend casually leaving it open, somewhere your nearest it, with your presents of highlighted

Dom

DOM HOLTAM
Editor-in-chief



Back in Black

R8 Professional Success Black Edition

Ergonomic perfection and superior shooting performance now come with a shot of extravagance. The black signature plate with golden lettering, gold-plated trigger, titanium-nitrated bolt head, and bolt handle ball made of solid steel will showcase your passion for hunting.

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Schultz & Larsen

Denmark



The Victory *at a Glance*

with a glass like smoothness in to the perfectly polished

action. The Victory is available in Right or Left hand.



Standard recoil pad colour is brown but a traditional brick red pad is an option on the higher wood grades.

As standard, the Victory is equipped with the excellent Schultz & Larsen single stage trigger, adjustable for weight and length. The Schultz & Larsen designed and made double stage Match trigger is available as an option. On this trigger the first stage of the pull takes 60% of the total pull weight, leaving a final light and crisp second stage.



The Victory has a switch barrel system allowing the barrel to be changed for any other in its calibre group with just a simple wrench. The standard bolt can be used with all calibres in the standard calibre group but if changing to a Magnum calibre you will need to change the bolt.



The top of the Victory action is milled to accept the Schultz & Larsen 'Slide & Lock' scope mounts, incorporating Summer and Winter scope position. For those who prefer a different mount, the action is drilled and tapped to accept Weaver or other bases. The radius of the action is 17mm and the hole spacing 22mm.

More information visit

GreatDaneRifles.com



The Sound Moderators *at a Glance*



Schultz & Larsen were quick to realise the potential of sound moderators. Silencing the report of the rifle is good for the environment, increases the precision of the rifle and reduces the risk of hearing damage.

Unusually, for a rifle maker at least, Schultz & Larsen have chosen to design and manufacture their own moderators. In doing so they have set the same standards for performance demanded of their rifles.

Each moderator is made of the highest quality materials and designed to withstand repeated firing with heavy calibres. Every baffle has a stainless steel cone in the centre to ensure longevity – hence the designation for this model range – ‘Schultz & Larsen Hardcore’.

Venom

Lighter than both the Superdome and Thunderdome, the muzzle mounted Venom offers excellent sound reduction in a compact package. Featuring an efficient internal design and a tough scratch resistant external finish.

Length :	165mm (+153mm to Barrel)
Diameter :	50mm
Weight :	365 g
Thread sizes :	Metric: M14x1, M14x1.5, M15x1, M17x1, M18x1 Imperial: ½" x 20 UNF, ½" x 28 UNEF, 5/8" x 24
Available in :	6.5mm, 7mm, .30", 8mm



MC38 Ultradome / MC44 Superdome / MC54 Thunderdome

A moderator to suit every application. The lightweight MC38 Ultradome with a slim design, the mid-weight MC44 Superdome for all round use with excellent noise reduction and the MC54 Thunderdome for maximum noise reduction and for taming magnum calibres.

Length (All Models) :	225mm (+120mm to Barrel)
Diameter :	MC38: 38mm MC44: 44mm MC54: 54mm
Weight :	MC38: 322 g MC44: 385 g MC54: 523 g
Thread sizes (MC38) :	Metric: M14x1, M14x1.5, M15x1 Imperial: ½" x 20 UNF, ½" x 28 UNEF
Thread sizes (MC44) :	Metric: M14x1, M14x1.5, M15x1 Imperial: ½" x 20 UNF, ½" x 28 UNEF, 5/8" x 24
Thread sizes (MC54) :	Metric: M14x1, M14x1.5, M15x1, M17x1, M18x1 Imperial: ½" x 20 UNF, ½" x 28 UNEF, 5/8" x 24
Available in (All Models) :	6mm, 7mm, 8mm



More information visit

GreatDaneRifles.com



SHOOTING NEWS

THE LATEST REPORTS FROM THE RIFLE WORLD

New Sako ambassador

GMK has appointed Paul Childerley, of Childerley Sporting, as brand ambassador for Sako.

As the son of a gamekeeper, Paul has grown up in the countryside and is passionate about shooting and stalking. He has managed gamebirds and deer on various estates over the years, becoming experienced in all aspects of countryside management.

In 1998 he moved to Bedfordshire, where he now manages fallow, muntjac and Chinese

water deer, producing excellent trophy animals. He is, therefore, ideally suited to help GMK with testing and evaluation of new Sako models, assessing their suitability for the UK market.

Commenting on the appointment, Paul said: "I am very particular with products that I associate myself with. I have owned a Sako for many years and it is invariably the one I reach for when heading out."



NGO has its say on firearms law

The National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) has responded to the Law Commission's consultation paper on making firearms law "more balanced and more effective".

The Law Commission sought the views of firearms users and others in order to gather evidence on consolidating and tidying up firearms law, which is, at present, to be found in more than 30 pieces of legislation.

A spokesman for the National Gamekeepers' Organisation said: "Firearms

ownership and use is an essential part of a gamekeeper's job and therefore, as professional users of firearms, our members' comments bring a unique perspective to any review of firearms law. We have told the Law Commission that the NGO will be happy to discuss or expand on any of the points we have raised if the Law Commission would find that useful."

To read the NGO's response, go to: www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk/law-commission-firearms-review



PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

BDS publishes lynx report

The British Deer Society (BDS) has published a comprehensive 33-page report on aspects of the possible reintroduction of the Eurasian lynx in Great Britain.

The report, which is available on the BDS website, will inform any responses the BDS may make during the consultation phase of any future applications to release lynx into the wild. It is also hoped that the report will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal by the authors Jos Milner and Justin Irvine.

The report was commissioned by the BDS in August after it was proposed that a reintroduction of lynx could help control Britain's burgeoning deer population. The report gathers current evidence about the lynx into one place, so an informed opinion can be formulated. John Bruce, chairman of the BDS Research Committee, explains: "There have been many differing reports on lynx in the press. This report addresses some of the main issues around the proposals and collates the evidence found in similar release programmes. Readers will come to their own conclusions about the potential for conflict and the probity of releasing lynx."

The BDS Scientific Advisor, Dr Alastair Ward, adds: "The BDS has been watching the debate with interest. We were keen to understand the pros and cons, particularly as they relate to deer and animal welfare, and to gather and synthesise this information from an independent, impartial source for the public good."

To read the report, visit www.bds.org.uk



PICTURE: LAURIE CAMPBELL



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Bushnell sponsors BDS with 12 trail cameras

American optics brand, Bushnell has donated 12 of its top spec Trophy Cam HD Essential cameras to The British Deer Society (BDS) to loan to its members.

Worth £163 each, the cameras are available to BDS members to borrow for an agreed period to assist with devising deer management plans.

The BDS's Training Manager, Glyn Ingram, explained: "For anyone who hasn't used a trail camera before, they open up a whole new world of information and interest. I used one continuously for three years on one estate; I moved it around systematically and the results were fantastic. I got photographs and film of a lot of deer and wildlife that I had not seen myself. The loan offer represents a great opportunity for members and we hope it will be well used. We are very grateful to Bushnell and Edgar Brothers. One word of warning: they do become addictive and 'checking the camera' soon becomes a new hobby all of its own!"

The Bushnell Trophy Cam HD Essential provides a plethora of top-tier, exclusive features. These include a variety of adjustable still image and camera settings that provide one to three images per trigger, or anywhere from five to 60



seconds of video. Plus, the three, five or 12-megapixel, high-quality and full-color resolution and automatic day/night sensor ensure crisp, clean views at any time. Plus, it'll go for up to 12 months on one set of batteries.

For more information and to download an application form, visit www.bds.org.uk

Leica opens its doors at The Royal Exchange

Urban field sports fans will now be able to sample the latest Leica sport optics in the heart of the City of London following the opening of a new Leica store at premium shopping destination The Royal Exchange.

The new outlet, known as Leica Store City, opened its doors on 5 October and is Leica's second in London. It represents an expansion of the company's retail presence and follows the success of its Mayfair store in Bruton Place, W1. Leica Store City carries the full range of Leica products from the M-System cameras and range of lenses, through to the T camera system, S-System, X-System and compact cameras. In addition, customers in the City of London can now experience and receive expert advice on a selection of the German brand's range of high-quality sport optics products, including the market-leading Leica Geovid HD-B and HD-R rangefinding binoculars, Leica's premium Magnus riflescopes, and the new Leica ER 6.5-26 x 56 LRS long-range specialist riflescope.

Jason Heward, Managing Director of Leica Camera Ltd, said: "The Royal Exchange is a natural 'second home' for Leica, with its rich heritage and prominent position. We are different from other sport optic brands, and it is important for us to create beautiful stores in locations where our customers like to shop. Our stores are places where new and existing Leica owners can meet our team of experts face-to-face."

The address of the new store is:

Leica Store City
No.18 The Royal Exchange
London
EC3V 3LP

For more information, visit uk.leica-camera.com



The British Deer Society launches new website

The British Deer Society (BDS) has unveiled its new state-of-the-art website, following months of development and design work behind the scenes.

The easy-to-navigate website, which incorporates vibrant graphics and eye-catching imagery, includes extensive information incorporating research, training, education, membership, fundraising, photography and competitions. For members seeking news relevant to their area, there are dedicated microsites for each local branch which will be updated regularly with news and events.

The BDS Chairman, Michael Thick, commented that the new website was designed for everyone, both members and non-members: "We want the website to be the authoritative source of robust information for all deer-related matters. That way, when a member of the general public or a national journalist is looking for some information, the BDS website will provide a solution. We are really pleased with the new layout and look of the website, and feel that it reflects the direction in which the BDS is going."

To view the website, visit www.bds.org.uk

The BDS is the only organisation that works exclusively for the welfare of wild deer throughout the UK.





Ibex cull amid cheese fears

France faces the prospect of a national fondue shortage after ibex in the Alps, where the precious reblochon cheese is farmed, contracted a contagious illness. Farmers are concerned that the nearby cattle, whose unpasteurised milk is used to produce the cheese, could contract brucellosis, or 'goat fever', from the neighbouring wild ibex.

Farmers fear a repeat of the great outbreak of 2012, when two children contracted the disease, prompting the destruction of mountains of reblochon cheese all over the country. In humans, the disease produces flu-like symptoms that, if left untreated, can lead to painful joints and even infectious arthritis.

In an attempt to control the outbreak and avoid an irredeemably fondue-free France, the local state prefect ordered a cull of up to 240 ibex, of which an estimated 40% are expected to be infected. It would leave around 75 ibex remaining. Park rangers managed to shoot 70 of the protected species before the cull was suspended following a court hearing.

Environmentalists are in uproar over the impending cull, but their opinions clash dramatically with the equally incensed French alpine farmers. The farmers face cattle culls, expensive quarantines and a loss of income should the fever spread into their herds. The environmentalists are calling for less severe action; a cull of infected animals combined with the vaccination of healthy animals. Concerns have also been voiced that shooting into the herds of sick animals could scatter them, allowing the disease to spread to neighbouring herds of ibex, and further threatening the future of fondue.

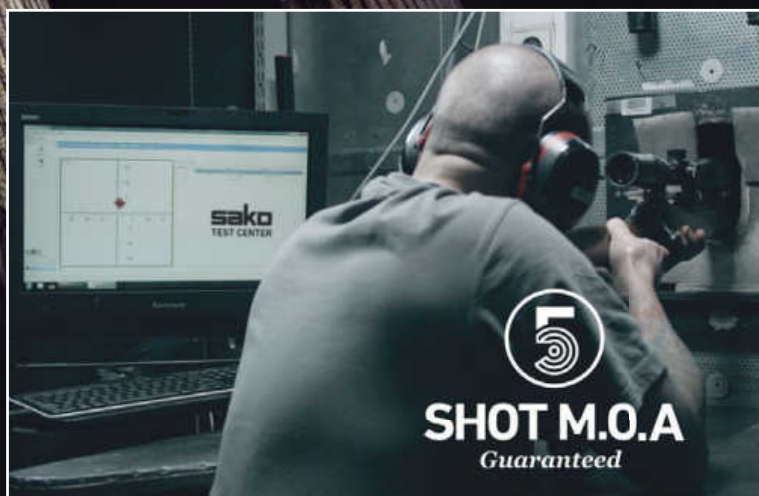
The outbreak also threatens several other prized national cheeses.



PICTURE: EMIL ENCHEV / ALAMY

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Sako rifles are the closest you can get to a custom rifle without breaking the bank. The choice of models and calibres is without equal. Sako utilise the latest technology and innovation in their production, guaranteeing that accuracy is second to none. Every barrel is crowned by hand and visually inspected, no machine equals the expert human in this function. Each Sako rifle is then carefully assembled by a single craftsman before test firing with 5 shots, the group must be within 1 MoA or it will not leave the factory.

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TRAIL CAM THAT WORKS WITH YOUR MOBILE

Observation cameras are becoming more and more popular for observing and studying nature and hunting grounds, and also for the surveillance of houses, gardens and dog kennels. Minox is expanding its current range with the new model DTC 1100 featuring GSM and 4G functionality for an even better and future-orientated network coverage. The images captured are transferred quickly and directly to a stored mobile phone number by MMS, or by mail to an email address. The advantage being that the user can respond immediately to the situation from anywhere, and take any necessary action.

It has never been so easy to install a camera with a mobile phone module. As soon as the SIM card is inserted, the DTC 1100 is ready to go and the user can select via Plug+Play from a range of pre-installed network providers with easy and fast access. If there is a poor signal, the camera automatically chooses the network with the best connection (GSM or 4G) to ensure permanent data transmission.

The high-power infrared flash with a range of up to 18m ensures reliable images, even in unfavorable light or in twilight conditions. A black filter fitted in front of the infrared flash makes the wavelength range of the flash invisible to people and animals alike.

The remote control function of the DTC 1100 allows photos to be taken via SMS and then transferred directly. An activation period can be set in which the camera is active, and the time-lapse mode allows shots to be taken at fixed intervals without motion detection.

The intelligent design of the motion detector offers greater flexibility when recording. Due to its individually adjustable sensitivity, the camera only captures desired objects and excludes all recordings of irrelevant motions, such as moving branches or grass.

The short shutter release of the DTC 1100 is less than one second. All data is stored on an SD card with up to 32GB and can also be viewed directly on the integrated two-inch monitor.

The camera is protected by a sturdy and weather-resistant plastic body to keep out water, dust, cold and heat. A security box for protection against theft is also available as an optional accessory.

The new Minox DTC 1100 comes with a fixing strap, SD card and USB cable.

For more
information, visit
www.minox.com or
call 01582 434383.
RRP: £375



STABLE TABLE

American brand, Caldwell has launched a clever new portable shooting bench with a host of tempting features. The Stable Table has a rigid tripod design with fewer joints than foldaway-style benches, making it sturdier and more rigid. The tabletop, seat and centre-shaft pivot around a central axis whilst remaining perfectly level to the horizon; this allows for quick shooting in any direction with just a spin or swivel. It also helps to avoid cartridges and other items rolling off the tabletop, as does the perimeter rail that runs around the bench top. The seats are comfortably padded and adjust from 16" to 22". The table weighs a total of 60lbs when assembled and breaks down into seven transportable pieces.

RRP: Stable Table £299; carry bag £44.55

www.edgarbrothers.com



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pivot around a
central axis*

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missing is no longer an option.



**SUPERFEATHER
TRIGGER**

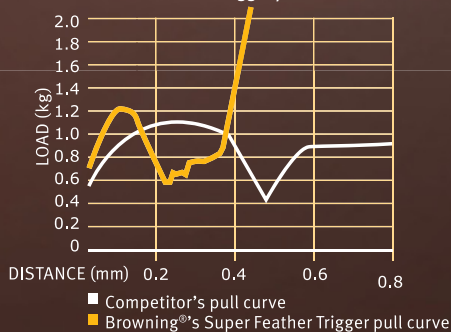
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New perfect trigger, super direct**

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Typical curve trigger pull movement
load on trigger pull



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www.facebook.com/BrowningEurope

“BROWNING FEATHERLIGHT TYPHOON

We are already big fans of the Browning Featherlight shooting jacket for hunting in warmer weather, but this new version, called the Typhoon, has a few extra twists. The asymmetric zip allows for a large central pocket and hand-warmers as on a smock, along with a chest pocket for a radio or phone.

It has shoulder reinforcement for your rifle sling, watertight zip fasteners and seams, a large adjustable hood and features the Pre-Vent waterproof, windproof and breathable membrane.

Packed with features, light in weight and striking in looks, the Typhoon is on sale now with an RRP of £209.

www.browning.eu



STALK STEALTHILY WITH STALON

GMK is now the UK distributor for Stalon, the market leader for sound moderators in Scandinavia.

Stalon moderators boast impressive performance in sound attenuation, which is complemented by the telescopic design, meaning its moderators give only a short extension to the barrel. They are low in weight, keeping the overall weight of the rifle and moderator to a minimum.

GMK believes this is a product which hunters are going to love, “not just because it will perform brilliantly but because, as we’ve all come to expect of Scandinavian manufacturers, no corners have been cut. Every component from the outer tube to the integral baffles are tested to perform at the highest level.”

Stalon manufactures its tubes from aircraft-grade aluminium alloy, T60/60, ensuring the units are strong, rigid and uniform. The outer surface is sandblasted which creates a matt exterior, minimising reflection in the bottom of the scope and reducing heat glare on the moderator itself. All surfaces are then anodised for increased durability.

Several of the internal components are given extra reinforcement, being manufactured in stainless steel, including the shoulder of the barrel thread.

GMK will be offering three models: the full size W110, W145 and the Compact model. Moderators will be supplied UK proofed.

Another feature of Stalon’s range of moderators is the ability to buy an additional front section, which includes an extra baffle. This can be fitted to the existing rear piece, which helps in terms of sound and recoil reduction.

RRP: from £299.95

www.gmk.co.uk



NOT YOUR AVERAGE ALARM

CaliberHunting’s Wireless Alarm is a reliable and hassle-free device, designed to serve as an extra pair of eyes in the field. The alarm alerts you to motion and will identify movement within your chosen ground.

The device is small and lightweight as well as being impressively easy to set up. The sensor attaches to the surface of choice (ideally a tree or a fence post) with a sturdy strap, and will begin operating immediately upon powering up. The receiver unit is attached to your person with its pocket or belt clips and produces a distinct, audible sound whenever the sensor detects heat or motion. The operational range is 100m.

The receiver sports a handy earphone jack to allow you to listen out via earphones, remaining completely covert should something pass by. With its completely weatherproof sensor and extensive battery life, this alarm system is fully prepared to be engaged in the wilderness.

RRP: £29.99

www.bushwear.co.uk



NITRO FORCE SMART REST

This brand new rifle rest has been engineered with the aim of enhancing your shot, and requires little to no set up in achieving its goal. Operating from a counterbalanced piston system, the rest provides user controlled variable tension and implements zero-gravity force to offer enhanced movement alongside smoother, steadier control of your rifle. The unique design enables rifles to acquire

and move between targets, perfect for following a running target or picking off multiple quarry in a field. The unit is easily portable with a purpose-built carry case, and can be firmly mounted to your vehicle's bonnet or roof, remaining in place at up to 60mph. (I did not verify this last claim!)

the adjustment is really very smooth and the unit feels nicely engineered. It gives you a feeling of bench-rest control but

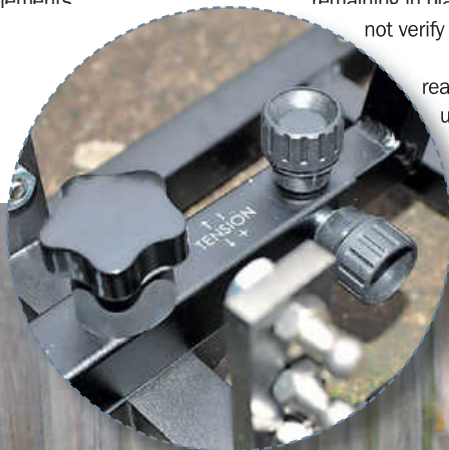
with real adjustability of shooting position.

Longer rifles – especially those with heavy barrels and sound moderators – might be too nose-heavy for the pistons (you can adjust the tension for the pistons with three different mounting points), so beware when setting it up.

I can maybe see some use for this in terms of long-range varminting, and as a tool to aid zeroing at the range it is great. A shooting rest with a difference.

RRP: £179.99

www.bushwear.co.uk



**TESTED BY
DOM HOLTAM**

FANCY A TACTICAL RIMFIRE REPLICA?

John Rothery (Wholesale) Co. Ltd has taken shipment of the first of the new H&K G36 .22 rimfire rifles manufactured by Walther in Germany.

The H&K G36 was designed in the early 1990s as a replacement for the heavier 7.62mm G3 battle rifle. It was accepted into service of the German armed forces and is used as an infantry weapon in a large

cost-effective .22 LR calibre. This model, manufactured by Walther, is the only genuine tactical rimfire replica available in the world.

You should expect to pay around the £599 mark from your local gun shop.

Visit www.bisley-uk.com to find your nearest retailer.



**a covetable rarity in a
cost-effective package**

Z-AIM PRO STALKER

TESTED BY
PHILL PRICE

Anybody who has spent any time in the field with a rifle on their shoulder knows how frustrating and annoying they can be. They slip down every 30 seconds and rifles with moderators tend to pull back, requiring yet another adjustment of the sling. Over the years, I've tried various fixes that were claimed to eliminate these problems but none worked to my satisfaction. Casstrom imports Z-aim products and they sent me their Pro Stalker sling which is like many others but with one addition. It has a strap that fits around the pistol grip, goes around your side, across your chest and then connects to the sling at the shoulder. It's very simple, yet once fitted worked incredibly well. To release the extra strap you press a button at the connector, which takes just a second once you have the knack.

The construction is neoprene for the shoulder pad, and ballistic nylon for the rest. I'll confess it took me a while to work out how

it all attached, but once the penny dropped it's actually quite obvious.

In the field it took a few minutes to adjust the various parts to get comfortable but then, miraculously, my heavy rifle locked into my side and didn't move again. This left my hands free to use the binoculars and I found I was walking in a more natural and balanced way, greatly reducing fatigue on a three-hour stalk. Even when squatting down or crossing a ditch, the rifle felt securely stable on my side. I know I'm gushing, but it really is that good. There are few accessories that can actually transform your experience in the field, but this one did for me.

I did feel slightly trussed up and you'll be slower getting the rifle on aim, but deer stalking isn't a fast-fire sport. I'm blown away by just how good this product is and I'll be fitting them to all my rifles.

RRP: £32.95

www.casstrom.co.uk

The Z-aim can be used as a single or double rifle sling, or as a game carrier.



MEET YOUR MATCH

Rifle shooters who get through a lot of ammunition but do not reload should look no further than Hornady Steel Match, a low-cost but accurate round that offers savings of up to 40% on brass-cased ammunition.

Distributed by Edgar Brothers, Hornady Steel Match is loaded at Hornady's factory in the US to ensure it meets the company's robust quality control standards.

The ammunition incorporates Hornady's renowned Match rifle bullets, which are loaded into polymer-coated steel cases that not only provide corrosion resistance but also ensure ease of feeding through the chamber. The

rounds are primed with non-corrosive Berdan primers and the ammo is available in the UK in .223 55gr HP, .223 75gr BT H, .308 155gr BT HP.

Derek Edgar, Managing Director of Edgar Brothers, commented: "The biggest component cost in manufacturing ammunition is in the case so Hornady's decision to use steel means they can produce a lower cost ammunition that still gives great performance. The fact that Hornady Steel Match is polymer-coated addresses concerns about steel causing corrosion or jamming and therefore I expect these rounds to be hugely popular."

RRP: from £46.33 per 100



FOUR-LEGGED FRIEND

These four-legged shooting sticks from Seeland are easily adjusted, with one handed clamps and optional spike/rubber feet. They can be extended up to 175cm and down to 90cm when packed up.

RRP: £89.99 (black)
£99.99 (Erase XT Camo)

www.seelanduk.co.uk for stockists



Providing support for both your barrel and stock, these shooting sticks can be set up, and collapsed, in seconds.

MEDIUM MOUNT

Sportsmatch Scope Mounts has released a medium-height version of its scope mount for weaver/Picatinny rails and 30mm scopes.

The company has produced a high version for some time but received considerable demand from shooters around the world who want to keep their scope's objective lens closer to the barrel – this often means a more comfortable head position and benefits longer range shooting.

This new model is made from aircraft specification materials on the latest CNC machining centres.

As with all Sportsmatch products, the new T078 is made in Great Britain and comes with a lifetime guarantee.

RRP: £57.95

www.sportsmatch-uk.com



STALK FROM DAY INTO NIGHT

The ATN X-Sight 5-18x Day/Night Vision riflescope is being billed as the world's first true day/night vision riflescope.

The X-Sight features a variable 5-18x magnification with full colour viewing by day, and black and white or traditional green night vision modes at night.

With a detection range in excess of 300m, the

ATN X-Sight is ideal for air rifle, rimfire and centrefire, and can be twinned with a high-power IR illuminator for long-range foxing.

It is packed with features including Wi-Fi, GPS and built-in video recording.

RRP: £779.00

www.scottcountry.co.uk

Tel: 01556 503587



ROLL UP, ROLL UP!

This 100% merino roll collar from Harkila is just the ticket for keeping the cold at bay when stalking this winter. Warm, lightweight and soft, this is the ideal stocking filler.

Available in Shadow brown.

RRP: £19.99

www.harkila.com



ROTTWEIL CARTRIDGE THERMOS

A brilliant Christmas gift for all shooting enthusiasts, this cartridge-shaped thermos will keep your drinks warm while out shooting. The design is based on the popular Waidmannsheil cartridge from Rottweil.

SRP: £21.00

www.ruag.co.uk



The flask's metal lid can also be used as a cup.

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MINI
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SWAZI TAHR XP

Hill stalking in Scotland provides the ideal conditions for Dom to test a Kiwi smock with plenty of wet-weather attitude

We live in an increasingly throwaway world, so it is nice to come across a piece of equipment built to last. The Tahr XP anorak (we'll call it a smock) is the latest piece of sartorial engineering from proud Kiwi company Swazi Apparel.

Swazi Apparel was set up 21 years ago and claims to make 'the world's most durable outdoor clothing'. Founder, Davey Hughes reckons he knows a thing or two about being out in the wet and the cold and his mission was to create the best garments for hunters and outdoorsmen.

A designer at heart, Davey is not a fan of extraneous detail on his garments. He doesn't like pockets and pouches at all. But the XP model moves the original Tahr concept on by adding large hand-warmer pockets with both press-stud closure and waterproof zips. But that is pretty

much it for stowage. A drawstring waist is incorporated and a big hood that is well designed to facilitate maximum peripheral vision

For me there is no tougher test for hunting gear than hill stalking. You might be forced to endure a lung-busting climb, followed by a long wait in high winds or heavy rain or snow. Or all three at the same time.

I was impressed by how breathable the Tahr XP's Aegis laminate proved to be over the course of some long climbs. We were also subjected to a fierce hail and rain storm and the Tahr proved utterly wind and waterproof. The cuffs did a decent job of stopping water running back up my forearms while glassing from prone, too.

The Tussock Green colour is a good match for the hill; paler than many offerings it is excellent in white grass and would do a decent job in most open environments, but might be a bit too pale for woodland work. A darker green is also available if you spend more time in forestry.

The extra-long 'scalloped' cut allows use as a 'seat', while the addition of hand-warmer pockets is a big improvement to my mind. I like to keep

bits and bobs in my jacket pocket – gloves, wind smock, etc. – and prefer not to carry a backpack, if possible.

I'm not a huge fan of Velcro on hunting gear, but by breaking the strip up into small sections it is possible to open it bit by bit. The zip (YKK, of course) goes down two-thirds of the length of the jacket to make it pretty easy to get on and off. The Aegis fabric isn't the quietest I have ever used – it has a slightly crinkly feel. But it is not noisy, by any means. And it feels significantly tougher than some of the latest lightweights from Gore. Plus, it beads water very well.

I have to say that a few day's intense wear have thoroughly impressed me. A quality garment made from top-notch materials and designed to give many years of reliable service. The Tahr is not a cheap jacket – it is, like a good rifle or a premium optic, an investment in your sport that will pay you back time and time again over the years. And in my book, that's a good thing.

RRP: £400

www.tamarackoutdoors.co.ukwww.swazi.co.nz/uk RS

ABOVE: The Tahr is windproof and waterproof, yet breathable

LEFT: The two-third length zip makes it easy to get the smock on and off



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2.5-10x50 Polar T96

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The 2.5-10x50 Polar is an ideal scope for the raised hide. With its 34 mm tube and the optional lockable quick reticle adjustment, it offers an unbelievable adjustment range for long-distance shots. The caps of the quick reticle adjustment can of course be engraved to customer specification for various cartridges and distances and can easily be exchanged by the customer.

For more product or dealer information visit: www.schmidt-bender.com or simply scan the QR-code



* Figure shows BDC windage/elevation (optionally available)

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

Long-range shooting is growing in popularity by the day, but not every hunter is thrilled about it. Ulf Lindroth argues that, with a sensible approach, we can all gain from this development

If your bullet leaves the muzzle of your rifle, climbs, falls, curves in the wind and then hits the intended spot – because not only did you predict its flight but you also compensated correctly for it – then you're a long-range shooter in my book. And I distinctly remember my first successful attempt of this kind.

My brother had just bought a Chinese-made airgun from an older boy for the equivalent of about £4. The rifle had taken a fall down some stairs, but the barrel was re-bent to an approximate straightness and our father welded on an old screw in place of the broken front sight. It wasn't pretty, but it worked.

On that very special day, it sent

a .177 pellet arching up towards a relatively distant magpie on the roof of the barn on my childhood farm. I wasn't old and wise to the rules of angle shooting, so the shot struck high. But it struck. And thus it began.

NOT JUST TRIGGER CONTROL

Rifle skills were among the main priorities of my father. There was always ammunition in the house and crows and magpies grew sparse as they offered early lessons to a boy with an old Husqvarna .22 LR.

Later, I took that rifle on winter hunts for ptarmigan in the mountains. I thought I could shoot by then, but reality on the mountains threw me a

Some lessons from this form of shooting will never need to be applied by a hunter, but it does build skills

humbling crash course in ballistics. Wind, angle and powder temperature all suddenly mattered. And I had thought it was all about trigger control...

When I was 15, I got a Tikka in .222 Rem and my first barking bird dog. I used them both for black grouse and capercaillie in the autumn. The shots could be tricky between

»





branches, but they were usually close. In the winter, that changed. Snow makes the birds take to the treetops. Up there, they see everything. This new challenge called for shots up to and above 200m, at a kill zone the size of a fist. And just as with the .22 on ptarmigan, cold weather changed the .222's point of impact. This just kept getting more complicated.

LONG-RANGE PROBLEMS

Later, with the 6,5x55 and good-match bullets, I started to think of 300m as reasonable. That may not seem a very long range, but in temperatures ranging from -5°C to -35°C, it's not close either, especially if you've been skiing for a couple of days to get your chance.

Still, such ranges are technically very straightforward. They don't necessarily require theory or calculations and, as there's usually little wind on cold winter days, all it took was a rangefinder, a chart of point of impact at different temperatures, and a solid rest in the soft snow.

I eventually reached ranges where true long-range problems started to appear: wind, obviously, but also spin drift and differences in air pressure. Powder temperature became a still bigger issue and needed a new approach. And about then it dawned on me just how much I needed to learn.

I started reading up on long-range

shooting. Enter rifle scopes with reliable tracking; better bullets; bipods; and eventually ballistic programmes. Plus, countless hours at the range and some shooting competitions. As a final breakthrough, I traded hunts for shooting lessons from friends who'd had proper sniper training and knew how to put complicated theory into quick rules of thumb.

USEFUL RIFLE LESSONS

Today, I hold the odd course in the basics of long-range shooting. We always start with a basic session at 100m and more than once that has triggered the question: 'Why don't they teach this at basic hunter's training?'

That just reinforces my belief that the uncompromising attention to detail in long-range shooting will benefit any rifle shooter. That's one reason I embrace the growing trend of long-range shooting, even though I'm sceptical about it.

I don't think it is ethical, sporting or even very interesting to take animals at unnecessarily long ranges. But I do think it's great that there is a new interest in rifles, optics, ammunition, ballistics and shooting techniques.

Long-range shooting is where I push my limits. When hunting, I want to feel confident, and even if my hunting ranges are much shorter than my practice ranges, they are still somewhat longer than they used to be. As long as I am completely

ABOVE: On this particular course, most shooters had to improvise to achieve the basic cheek-to-comb fit

BELOW: Taking powder temperature into account will improve your trajectory predictions, and help you find the hits just where you want them

confident, I don't see anything wrong with it and, when I do enjoy stalking closer prey, improved shooting skills do not stop me.

So, what long-range lessons do I apply in my everyday hunting? Actually, just a handful, but they go a long way towards avoiding unpleasant surprises...

Recoil management

Any rifle will start moving before the bullet leaves the barrel. This will affect accuracy. Period. Recoil



A wolf shot at 330m on a bait in Alberta, Canada. This is one kind of situation where there will often be time to adjust the scope for the exact range... and where it may be necessary



"THE UNCOMPROMISING ATTENTION TO DETAIL IN LONG-RANGE SHOOTING WILL BENEFIT ANY RIFLE SHOOTER"

management matters, and shooting position is how it's controlled. The lighter the rifle and the heavier the recoil, the more it matters.

I shoot a lot from a solid prone position, using bipods and a rear bag. I have three main check points to tell me I'm in the right position to handle the recoil. They are: the pressure of the stock towards my shoulder; the pressure of my cheek on the comb; and the firmness of the grip in my trigger hand.

Very often I'm not able to shoot prone on a hunt. Still, as long as I feel the familiar pressure at shoulder, cheek and trigger hand, I can expect to control my rifle well regardless of shooting position.

Trajectory control

I try to compensate for my trajectory even when it's not absolutely necessary. If the bullet will strike exactly where I've put my crosshairs, this will increase my margin for other errors.

There is one exception. When I expect quick shots at medium-sized game at varied ranges within 150 or 200m, I still zero my rifle with an impact point slightly over the line of sight at, say, 100m. I can then aim dead centre, out to where the bullet has dropped somewhat under the line of sight.

This is very practical, but if you push your range or shoot at smaller targets, you may find that your

margins become small indeed. If there is time, I prefer to range an animal and dial a correction on my scope turret. I like to have my turret marked with distances instead of numbers of clicks, but I will not trust those markings blindly.

I have my turret marked with actual drops, from a shooting session in the kind of weather I expect on most hunts, not from factory data. Then, prior to a hunt, I will check temperature and air pressure by measurement or at a weather site. I will run the values in my ballistic calculator to see if the conditions vary enough to make the trajectory diverge from my existing turret marks. If so, I will just remember whether I need to add or subtract a click or two on that specific day. This will allow me to be fast and accurate.

Temperature homework

I always shoot new ammunition through a chronograph in as many different temperatures as possible. I then put the resulting variation in metres per second per degree into the ammunition profile in my ballistic calculator. Thanks to this bit of kit, any simple morning check will give me the change in point of impact, not only due to atmospheric distances, but also due to changes in powder temperature. It will mostly matter with small game in extreme



ABOVE: Even when shooting standing from a tripod, the triple check of cheek, shoulder and hand grip will contribute to better accuracy in the field

temperatures, or with targets at extreme ranges, but it will always improve your predictions.

Wind limitations

I measure or try to estimate the maximum wind at the time of hunting. I run a rule of thumb (or a ballistic app) to check how much the wind will drift my bullet at various ranges. Taking the results into consideration, I settle for a maximum range for the day, usually the range where I can hold on one edge of the vital area and still be sure to hit somewhere in it. I memorise the drift for a couple of shorter ranges and keep in mind that, as soon as there's a lee or a less than straight

BELOW: Hunting ptarmigan in the mountains with a .22 LR is a sure way to build respect for the importance of wind and powder temperature, even if ranges are short

"RECOIL MANAGEMENT MATTERS, AND SHOOTING POSITION IS HOW IT'S CONTROLLED"



angle to the wind, the drift will be less. If I shoot straight into the wind, it will be nothing. There are more sophisticated approaches to wind corrections, but this will serve well for most hunters.

Shopping list

Every rifle hunter should have a stock that provides a firm cheek contact when looking through the scope. A good shoulder contact in the prone position is also very useful. A good rangefinder is not cheap, but it will be priceless. A tool to measure wind, air pressure and temperature will, combined with a ballistic app, give your accuracy that extra edge. And to make the most of it all, top your rifle with a scope with good long-range turrets. [RS](#)



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Continental envy

I have been lucky enough to have hunted/stalked in a number of countries. This has provided a great comparison of not only how others hunt, but also the culture of hunting.

I think the UK is missing out. We are relatively new to the world of lowland stalking, whilst our Continental counterparts have been much more active over many more years. Whilst we have creditable organisations such as the BDS, NGO, BASC and others on a national scale, we lack the real regional networks.

In Austria, for example, stalkers or hunters will gather from a region on a regular basis, discussing cull plans, strategy, quality and numbers of animals managed and of course, the main event of the year, exhibiting *all* of the bucks and stags culled during a season. I believe this is law and that no trophies can be released until after this event.

This has to be a better combined way of managing deer populations, bringing together local knowledge and expertise and being able to assess the impact of management and the quality of the animals being managed. Add to this regional events promoting local suppliers of equipment, game dealers, local courses and services, and you will end up with not only a

LETTER OF THE MONTH

more informative local event, but establish better relations with your neighbouring hunters, stalkers and suppliers.

I have experienced other such regional groups in both Germany and Croatia, with great success.

Let's start talking about stalking with our neighbours.

Simon Scott-White,
by email



PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

Trigger-happy teckel

I really enjoyed the November issue of *Rifle Shooter* (having accidentally missed the first issue!).

As evidenced in this photo of the scene to which I returned after leaving the room for a few minutes, so did troublesome Trigger, my working teckel!

Simon, by email



SEND YOUR LETTERS TO: Rifle Shooter, 2-6 Easthampstead Road, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG40 2EG or email editorial@rifleshootermagazine.co.uk

Facebook fears

Firstly, a very big thank you for a first-class mag covering everything a rifle shooter needs. It has been well overdue and I hope it is as well received by the mainstream as it has been in our home!

I would like to warn your less experienced readership about Internet-based forums and, in particular, Facebook 'interest' groups. I am a member of a couple of internet forums and several Facebook groups. Over the last 10 years or so, I have met some fantastic people via the forums. On forums, people tend to either be invited by existing members, or spend a few months getting to know everyone.

However, the Facebook groups are different. Most groups seem to be trying to outdo each other and gain more members. This is a very dangerous situation, and attracts some seriously dodgy behaviour. In the last couple of months, I have come across various examples...

A new member asked for advice on suitable calibres for foxes, as he only had a .22 RF rifle at present. A regular contributor recommended he buy a .17 HMR (despite it not being within ACPO guidance). As some members stated that the .17 HMR was a reasonable round to use 'in certain situations', our intrepid firearms expert refuted all claims of unsuitability, and claimed regular killing shots to the chest of a fox, at distances of up to 240 yards!

A regular member of one group recently posted a photo of his teenage daughter dressed in a fox onesie. Reasonable enough, you may think, until you saw that he had a rifle (bolt closed) pointed at her chest. His caption read along the lines of 'I saw this milky fox today, so decided to shoot it'.

When people are losing their FACs and their chosen sports due to ever increasing legislation and hoop jumping, is it not time that we, the shooters, start to legislate ourselves?

Is it not time that these social media group owners were encouraged to police the groups with more in their minds than 'hits', sticker sales and member numbers?

I do fear that the worst antis are sometimes us, shooters ourselves.

Name supplied



PICTURE: DAVID MASON

Coming up in next month's Rifle Shooter

FALLOW DEER

Are big bucks on the decline?



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Travel safe

Q I am never sure what to do with my rifle when I am travelling. Do I leave it in the car or take it into the hotel room?

A LACHLAN NESBIT replies: You should aim to leave your gun in the most secure place possible, and to put in place as many 'barriers' as possible to prevent access. The law recognises that, because of the range of circumstances that can arise, the legal obligation can only be to take reasonable steps to ensure security. This requires you to pause for thought and to make sure that you plan ahead.



PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

If you are intending to stay at a hotel, you should ring ahead and tell them that you will be bringing firearms. (There have been a couple of high-profile examples of what can happen if you don't.)

Unless there are suitably secure storage facilities that only you have access to, you will need to think carefully about how to store your guns. In the case of a shotgun, I would recommend leaving the stock well hidden in your car; the barrels secreted somewhere in your hotel room or the hotel safe; and the fore-end with you at all times.

In the case of a rifle, I would suggest that you remove the bolt, keeping it with you at all times, and store the rifle either in the hotel room or in your car – the location of the parked vehicle may impact this decision. You might like to consider purchasing a good-quality bike lock or steel cable and padlock so that you can anchor the rifle to a suitably secure point in the boot of the car – obviously well out of sight.

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DOM HOLTAM



STALKER AND EDITOR

Dom is an experienced stalker and deer warden

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LEGAL ADVICE

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Are white red deer albino?

Q I have seen a white deer in amongst a herd of red while out stalking recently. My friend said it must be an albino – is that correct? I must say, we both enjoyed spotting it.

A MIKE ALLISON replies: In most cases the coats of almost all red deer are as the name suggests – red – at least in the summer coat, and the winter coat is a more brownish-grey colour.

However, occasionally, there occurs a very pale, grey to almost white red deer – something that appears to have been happening for centuries. But, contrary to popular belief, almost all cases of white red deer in the UK are not albino.

Although there have been very occasional occurrences of true albino red deer throughout the world, in the UK they are almost certainly the result of leucism rather than albinism.

The main visual contrast between albino and leucistic is the eye colour. A characteristic of albinism is a total lack of pigmentation throughout the entire body, so the eyes, nose and even the hooves are pink.

But the leucistic animal has normal eye, nose and hoof colour, and the coat can either be totally white or grey, or a subtle mixture of white and red hair, making the colour appear like a roan.

Albinism is caused by an animal inheriting a defective gene – or genes – resulting in the animal's cells being unable to produce the pigment called melanin, which gives the animal its colour.

Leucistic red deer possess a gene or group of genes that causes a condition where the skin is unable to support normal pigment cells. Scientists have identified that in leucism there is a genetic defect in the skin itself, whereas in the albino it is a genetic defect within the actual pigment cells.



PICTURE: MIKE ALLISON

What dog for deer?

Q I'm thinking of buying a dog to train for tracking. What is the best breed for this kind of work?

A TONY LOWRY replies: I think this is one of the questions I get asked most. The answer is, it depends on what you want out of your dog.

Most breeds of dog can track a wounded animal, some better than others and it's not breed specific. Some of the best cold-tracking dogs I have seen have been cross-breeds, as well as breeds you would expect to buy for tracking, such as hound breeds.

The things to consider are you own needs and your personal circumstances.

Here are some of the things you may take into consideration when choosing a dog:

- How much work is your new dog going to get?
- Is my new puppy/dog going to fit into my home environment?
- Dogs with a game drive are probably going to be better than a pet-breed dog.
- Have I got the time to train my new dog?
- Some breeds are naturally calmer and easier to work with than others.
- Having a good source of deer/boar bits for training such as hooves, blood, skins and heads may also be a concern.
- Do your homework on all the different breeds and speak to as many different people as you can that have tracking dogs before you make your choice.

As a guide, the most commonly used working breeds in the UK are:



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

- Labrador
- German pointer (short and wire)
- Bavarian mountain hound
- Hanoverian hound
- Teckel (dachshund)
- With many others and various crosses putting in an appearance.

What the very best performing dogs have in common is an owner who has put a very significant amount of time into well-directed training. UKDTR members are always willing to help with advice on training and breed selection.

www.ukdeertrackandrecovery.co.uk

Running practice

Q I am relatively experienced in UK deer stalking but I am due to attend a driven hunt next year and have never shot running animals before. Can I practise this discipline in the UK with a full-bore rifle?

A DOM HOLTAM replies: Yes, you can. There are an increasing number of ranges in the UK that offer this facility: Corinium in the South West, Minsterley near Shrewsbury, Diggle up near Oldham, Orion over in Wales, Bisley in Surrey, and coming soon, WMS, also in Wales.

Often these facilities can be rented by the hour and it is definitely time and money well spent. For those of us used to tackling stationary targets, getting that rifle swinging and finding a repeatable lead picture is crucial to success on running targets. You will feel much more confident with a bit of training under your belt.



PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

Shed some light on the subject

Q There are so many lamps on the market that I have no idea where to spend my money. What would you recommend for a newcomer to lamping foxes?



PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

A ANDY CROW replies: The good news is that there has never been more choice. Or better batteries. Or more competitive prices. Gone are the days of lugging a motorcycle headlamp wired up to a car battery around the fields!

For my lamping, I normally use two types of light. A big 'scanning' lamp with a wide beam that I use to sweep the fields and locate any foxes. Then I prefer the tightly focused LED torch, which allows me to keep the beam off the animal until the last second.

There are lots of great brands out there. I have used Lightforce, Deben and Clulite over the years. For the smaller torches, I am a big fan of the Nitemaster range. These have great range and are built tough.

Correct cleaning procedure

Q Can you explain the best barrel-cleaning procedure for medium-calibre rifles, 2,000 to 3,000fps?

A ANDREW VENABLES replies: This will depend on how many rounds have been fired...

a.) One to 10 rounds fired – either let the barrel be, or pull a dry bore snake (or push a phosphor bronze brush) through it two to three times. Remove moisture and visible dirt, give it a wipe, and then spread a drop of oil on the

bearing surfaces of the bolt and action to keep things moving easily. Take a few practice shots to ensure your rifle shoots to the same point of zero prior to cleaning, before going after your next deer/pest/target.

b.) Twenty to 60 rounds fired – you now have carbon and copper build-up taking place and the faster the rounds are fired, the more deposits are likely. To ensure a perfect first-round shot next time the rifle is fired, soak a nylon brush with carbon remover (I use KG-1) and push it up and down the barrel 10



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

times. Reapply carbon remover, then push up and down 10 more times. Leave for 10 minutes then remove with solvent and/or dry patches.

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Blued Varmint pictured

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THE INSIDE TRACK

We talk to Tony Lowry, chairman of UK Deer Track and Recovery, who is taking positive steps to assist stalkers and shooters with his national network of trained trackers

RS: What does UK Deer Track and Recovery (UKDTR) do?

TL: We provide a free-of-charge tracking service for shooters who have lost an animal – or think they have lost an animal – that is wounded. In scenarios like this, a UKDTR team, of tracker and dog, will go in and try to locate the animal and dispatch it humanely.

RS: What was the reason for establishing UKDTR, and how did the idea come to you?

TL: About eight years ago I met Kim Jorgensen, a well-known deer tracking judge from Denmark. I realised there was no deer tracking service in the UK, despite the fact that there was a need for one, so after a lot of

work and discussion I set up UKDTR with my friend Richard Evans in 2013. Of course, many stalkers are excellent shots, but no matter how good a shot you are, there is always the risk of wounding an animal and you may well need help finding it and sorting the problem out.

RS: How does the service work in practice?

TL: We have a call-out system and all UKDTR trackers, the areas they cover and their contact details are listed on our website. All a stalker needs to do is call the relevant tracker who will ask a number of questions and will then go out to try and resolve the problem in the field. If there is no one listed in a particular

area, then the stalker can call me and I will put him or her in touch with members of other organisations that provide tracking services. Our services are all done on a voluntary basis, but any donations go into UKDTR funds to help train more tracking teams.

RS: If I need your services, what information should I have to hand when I call you?

TL: There is a lot the stalker can do to give us the best chance of recovering the animal, such as noting the time of the shot, the species and sex of the animal, marking where the shot was fired from and where the animal was standing, marking the strike site clearly and trying not to disturb it too much.



Tony doesn't believe that deer-tracking prowess is breed specific

Please have a look at our website for full shot-site guidance.

RS: How many trackers do you have and how often are you called out?

TL: We currently have 14 trackers around the country, some of which are gamekeepers because we are strongly supported by the National Gamekeepers' Organisation. How often they are called out really depends on where they are; the guys in Lincoln, for example, don't get called out as much as I do because I'm in the Hampshire/Berkshire area, which is very deer rich. I may get called between 20-40 times a year with success in about 70% of cases; there are some deer that we just don't find – some go onto land which we don't have permission to access, and some may not have been injured at all.

RS: What training do UKDTR trackers and dogs need to have?

TL: We run introductory days for anyone interested in working with us. If the person goes on to buy a puppy, they need to train it in deer tracking, become probationary members of UKDTR and complete their tracking test and dog handling test (which ascertains the skills of the dog, too) within that year. We bring in Danish judges to monitor the tests to keep things transparent and give the tests credence.

The handler training covers a great deal: law, the equipment needed, deer behaviour and reaction to shot (with the handler having to correctly identify four set up shot sites to say where they think the animal has been hit). Trackers must also have a firearm held on an open Firearm Certificate.

On the rifle front, we are sponsored by Blaser, which means that our trackers are able to buy rifles with short tracking barrels at a reduced price, which is a great help; we are all very grateful to Robert Sajitz of Blaser Sporting for supporting us in this way.

RS: What breeds of dog make the best deer-tracking dogs and why?

TL: Bavarian mountain hounds or Hanoverian hounds and German wirehaired pointers are excellent, but Labradors and even breeds such as teckels can also be superb. It's really down to the nose and I don't believe it is breed specific. The best tracking dog I've ever seen is Kim Jorgensen's Labrador, and I've seen a few deer dogs in my time. Cross-breeds can also be extremely good.

RS: What training goes into making a good deer-tracking dog?

TL: Training really starts when the dogs are puppies, in the form of play and association with the work that lies ahead. So you might mark a metre square on the lawn and drag a liver over it and then chuck a handful of biscuits



Tony runs deer tracking training courses for both handlers and dogs

onto that so it associates the scent with something nice, like being fed. That process goes on until the pups are about four months old and the training gets more serious, but you do have to be careful that the dog doesn't get bored, especially if they are a hound breed. You also have to remember that training needs to carry on through the dog's life.

RS: What equipment do you need to successfully track?

TL: As well as a rifle, sight and ammo, there are GPS collars in case you have to release your dog rather than just work it on the leash, binoculars, radios or mobile phones, a good knife, and high-vis clothing for safety. All our trackers also carry their ID card that shows they have successfully completed our handler and dog test, and that they have adequate insurance cover.

RS: What future plans do you have for UKDTR?

TL: Our plans are to raise awareness of

UKDTR, to increase the number of trained and experienced tracking teams, and to link with other known groups, where possible. In order to do this we will continue to provide training events for both novice and developing dog/handler teams.

We also want to place as many teams as possible on a voluntary basis at the disposal of estate managers, deer managers and stalkers in as many parts of the UK as we can, so please spread the word!

RS: Lastly, what is your favourite cheese?

TL: Double Gloucester... it's creamy and delicious.

For more information about UKDTR, visit:

Facebook: UKDTR

Twitter: @tonylowry123

Website: www.ukdeertrackandrecovery.co.uk

To contact Tony Lowry, email tonylowry123@outlook.com or call 07787 158888.

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SAVAGE MODEL 16 ACCUSTALKER



PICTURES: CHRIS PARKIN

Solid, sleek and functional, Savage's UK-specified Model 16 finds favour with Chris Parkin

The AccuStalker from Savage is a UK-specific model that has been specified for the wants and needs of our pest control, foxing and stalking preferences. Available in .223, .243 and .308, it keeps choices simple and, most importantly, is easy to feed with effective ammunition. I had the .308 version to test and although I have shot many Savages before, this was my first experience of the Model 16 which, although visually subtle, shows major differences.

Savage button-rifle all their barrels in-house to ensure full quality control and their reputation for making accurate rifles for real shooters is well established. The AccuStalker sports a 20" barrel with a threaded half-inch UNF at the muzzle for a sound moderator, and carries six 11"-long flutes around its circumference. The barrel is the first stage in quite a short, stocky package and begins ¾" at the crown, a straight taper swelling to a 1" diameter where it meets the barrel

ABOVE: Considering the length of the barrel, recoil was minimal

nut. Unlike the usual cannellured nut, the Model 16's is smooth so it is not easy to disassemble with a 'C' spanner. But as replacement is unlikely by anyone in the UK (like they are in the US), we should put this to one side and be grateful to this system for its ability, on a factory rifle, to guarantee 100% headspace accuracy when each gun is assembled.

A recoil lug is sandwiched into the barrel nut assembly that pins the front of the 6"-long, 1.350" diameter action »



into the AccuStock's full-length bedding block. I have seen the quality control procedures being carried out in the Savage factory, which include coordinate-measuring machines randomly checking actions, so I was unsurprised to see that the stainless, satin-finished action was of a diameter accurate to 0.001" – they do not mess around! A large ejection port opens the action to its top right. Although the detachable magazine cannot be top-loaded, the gun will single-feed off the top of the mag perfectly smoothly.

Savage bolts are signature items with a 3" long handle right at the back, and are easily manipulated by the 1" ball on its tip. The bolt is made in multiple parts and carries a floating bolt-head that assists in centralising the round in the chamber and equalising the pressure borne by the two lugs that nestle between twin gas

escape ports. The shaft is engine-turned for a bright finish and functions smoothly with clean feeding and positive ejection. The extractor claw slides within the right-hand lug's face with a sprung ejector sited below it to the left, directly opposite the port, if you imagine looking along the gun from your normal shooting position.

Primary extraction is supplied by a cammed washer. This is sited at the rear of the action, wrapped around the bolt before the bolt's handle/shroud. Being able to watch it work allows people to see another of the subtle tasks the bolt must undertake for a smooth lift and close.

NEW BOLT REMOVAL

The second difference we see on the Model 16 is bolt removal. Gone is the lever to the right of the action that had

ABOVE:
The AccuStock incorporates a full-length aluminium bedding block for serious rigidity, bedding accuracy and long-term durability

to be pressed down in coordination with the trigger to slide out the bolt. It has been replaced by a slider/button at the front of the trigger guard. Although tricky to use at first, you soon get used to pulling the trigger with your second finger as your index wraps around it and both come back at once.

Tang safeties are very slick and this one is just big enough to be operated by a gloved thumb – back for fully locked and safe; middle allowing bolt operation; and forward to 'fire'. This must also be set to fire to allow the bolt to be removed. Twin-action screws fasten the gun into the stock and the rear screw is below the slider button. When correctly torqued up, I found no bedding stress in the action/stock interface – but be careful when reassembling it as the bolt retention metalwork is made of steel that is quite soft and will trap and bend if forced. Recoil lug and action mate well with the bedding block and, when repeated, I found little zero shift, which is a good sign of a stress-free pairing. Although the gun is stainless and the stock synthetic, if it gets a good soaking, and especially if it gets covered in mud and



The soft pad absorbs recoil well, and the non-slip material ensures a secure fit when shooting

Located right at the back of the bolt, the large bolt handle is easily controlled by a 1" ball at its tip

\\ THE GUN FELT SHORT AND COMPACT, AND HAD A SOLID, PURPOSEFUL FEEL //

other debris, it will always need a strip down for a thorough clean.

The four-round detachable magazine is staggered with a top centre feed, so it must be removed from the gun in order to load it. There is a decent-sized lever to the front of the mag that, when pulled, allows the mag to drop free; but, be warned, the mag will click in but not feed if incorrectly inserted. Make sure you lift the rear of the mag into the well first before pressing the front toward the catch. If you don't do this, it is also a fiddle to remove.

AccuTriggers were the first, but the system of an internal blade safety is not rare these days. I don't really think about them now as they are so light it's just like first pressure on a two-stage trigger, and like all other AccuTriggers, you get a very clean break. I recorded 1,200g/42oz and it was very consistent, too. A tool is supplied to vary the weight but actual weight range is not specified, probably to safeguard the lawyers. But, if you need a light trigger, by following the instructions carefully, you shouldn't find going below 42oz a problem. You can get a gloved finger inside the

PROS

AccuTrigger

Perfect functionality

Modest recoil for a short barrel

CONS

The stock is not to my taste

Disassembly is fiddly

Slightly rough ½" thread at the muzzle

ABOVE RIGHT: The three-position safety locks the bolt when fully rear but allows safe opening in the central position with 'fire' at the front

The 20" barrel is fluted and finished with a ½" thread at the muzzle for the addition of a sound moderator

The synthetic AccuStock contains a bedding block that supports the fully floated barrel

WE ALSO USED

Weaver 3-15x50
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Weaver scope rings, £30
Hornady 150gr SST
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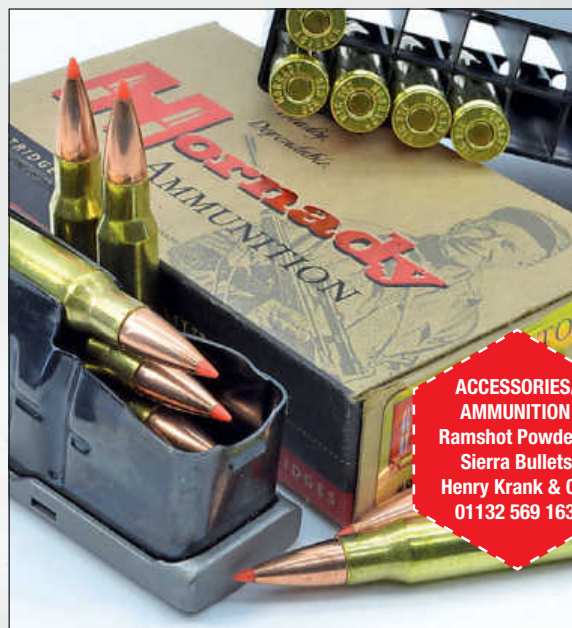
spacious trigger guard and as this is supposed to be a hunting rifle, not a target gun, a well-controlled squeeze is the preferred technique, especially with cold, wet and numb fingers.

SYNTHETIC STOCK

The final 'Accu' is the AccuStock. It is a synthetic unit that shows none of the weaknesses of simple injection-moulded polymers as, although not a hand-laid carbon fibre unit, it contains a full-length aluminium bedding block. This not only assures correct inlet and bedding for the rifle, but also retains a stiff fore-end to fully float the barrel, all the way back to the breech, all of the time. No

intermittent wobble and drift here. The beavertail profile has a flat base, but is not overly wide, and has two studs to fit bipod and sling to. The grip is quite slim and I'd prefer a bit more to hold, but reach to the trigger blade is okay. It is chequered for grip with a cap at its base. A small amount of right-hand cast is visible toward heel and toe to assist head positioning, but as the cheekpiece is quite low, only your jaw is placed next to it anyway. It is nowhere near the bolt, and in these days of scoped rifles, I really do not understand why manufacturers persist with such low combs at the design stage. The shape here is good with a slim roll that allows comfort, but it could have been made at least half an inch higher and not caused any problems for bolt removal. A long action bolt (the stock shows a few mould lines around the mag well where mould components are interchanged within moulds to process long action versions of the stock) adds a little more consideration, but this is not an insurmountable problem. The comb also sloped down towards the shoulder. Parallel is 'normal' now and sloping upward to the rear is becoming common as this eases recoil impact to the face. The stock is finished off at the back with a 1" thick, hollow recoil pad that is very soft and grippy so aids both recoil absorption and retaining position in your shoulder when shooting.

RIGHT: Chris was supplied with Hornady's renowned 150gr SST Custom loading



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HOW DID IT SHOOT?

Edgar Brothers supplied scope, mounts and bases for the gun, along with Hornady Custom .308 ammunition; the well-known 150gr SST bullet estimated to fly at 2,820fps. A quick run-in at the range and it took 20 or so rounds of shooting and cleaning to settle the barrel/ammo combo to three-shot groups just over the inch at 100 yards but remaining on zero, regardless of how deliberately careless I was with hand pressures on the fore-end. Hornady ammunition is usually not too dishonest in its speed estimates, so to produce a figure of 2,740fps with an extreme spread of only 14fps from a 20" tube was impressive. There are no qualms about the 2,500ft/lb of energy remaining deer legal in any conditions, and the big plus of a .308 is the ease with which any ammo passes the 1,700ft/lb threshold, even from a short barrel. I ran some hand-loaded ammunition through the

gun and it showed no particular bullet weight preference; the one in 10" twist rate is a good choice as it will stabilise ammo of 125 to 200-plus grains. Good speeds for a 20-inch with acceptable pressure signs remaining throughout due to the solidity of the gun; I'd have been tempted to stick with the 165s, which seemed to get the best combination from the gun for both speeds and energy.

The AccuStalker was very soft to shoot and contrary to my opinions on the comb, recoil was well absorbed through the soft pad with a very direct path into the shoulder from the gun's geometry. Prone at 100 yards, it hardly moved more than a few inches off the aim point after recoil, and a moderator would diminish this even further. There was none of the skittish liveliness that accompanies the often snappy .308 round and no bounce at all in the stock's fore-end. When handling the rifle, balance was slightly nose-heavy and the short but relatively fat barrel

ABOVE: Savage's floating bolt head is both replaceable and part of the accuracy promise. Extraction and ejection was 100% effective

VERDICT

This is yet another solid performer from Savage. The looks keep getting a little sleeker, too

profile with straight taper no doubt assisted the overall feel. When carrying, the gun felt short and compact, and had that solid, purposeful feel of rugged simplicity which seems to physiologically breathe reliability. For dry mounting and moving targets, the gun was great fun as the swing was fantastic and it 'pointed' so well.

AccuTriggers break cleanly, and if inadvertently operated they 'click', deadening themselves and locking the sear. You need to re-cycle the bolt to re-engage the operation and this is no bad thing. I have had a negligent discharge with another rifle in the past (fortunately, safely close to the target backstop) when I caught my coat sleeve on the trigger and it gives you a short, sharp shock. This is the kind of accident the AccuTrigger will not allow, as if the inner blade is not pressed in fully first, the outer blade will not function. You can happily get a gloved finger in the trigger guard and, on a hunting rifle, I have no qualms with 2lbs-plus. The safety catch works perfectly and remains quiet in operation, but, in the end, my only real dislike of the gun is the grip, which, although chequered, is so slender it feels a bit like a straight-hand shotgun unit and I certainly don't have excessively large hands. But perhaps this is what makes the gun so pointable? Reach to trigger is okay and the 13.5" length of pull is fine when bulked up with heavy outdoor clothing. Injection-moulded items are seriously expensive to tool up for; stocks tend to get designed once and made the same forever – unlike barrel length and profiles, they are not easy or cheap to change. **RS**

THE ALTERNATIVES / WITH A SHORT, HEAVY BARREL THE SAVAGE IS QUITE UNUSUAL, BUT THERE ARE SIMILAR OPTIONS...



CZ 557 Synthetic

I have shot the walnut-stock version of this gun and was hugely impressed with the updates over the old 550. The synthetic stock looks well designed and I'm itching to get hold of one, but no .223 version yet...



Tikka T3

The Tikka has a great reputation and all of it is true. I don't love the 'not-quite-floated barrel' but these guns shoot and handle well in all calibres, with good stock geometry. Many barrel options echo the Savage's compact ethos, including the T3 Tactical.



Mauser M12 Synthetic

This is a lighter gun but in a similar price bracket. It has, in my opinion, the nicest bolt action on the market full stop. It is very accurate and handles superbly. The fore-end could be a little stiffer, but accuracy never seems affected.



Steyr Mannlicher CL II SX

The latest CL II SX could seriously put the cat among the pigeons with a stock update and the Steyr hammer-forged reputation to uphold. Just that little bit different with safeties and triggers to beat. Again, no small action .223 option though.

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CALIBRES	BARREL LENGTHS
.243 WIN*	22"
.270 WIN	24"
.308 WIN*	22"
.30-06 SPR	24"
.300WIN MAG*	24"
7MM REM MAG	24"
6.5X55 SE*	24"
(*Threaded)	





GREAT HUNTING? CZECH!

Thousands of hectares of natural beauty; banter-filled lunches by a roaring fire; exciting quarry driven with military precision... Owen Beardsmore paints a compelling picture of the Czech management hunts



If a respectful hunt, organised with military precision, conducted within 20,000 hectares of natural beauty, and resulting in a crowded tableau of exciting game conquests is your idea of heaven, read on, read on...

It was over 20 years ago that I first went to the Austrian Alps in pursuit of one of my favourite and most challenging game species – the chamois. It was during one of these visits that I became acquainted with Leonard Colloredo-Mansfeld, an Austrian Count the same age as myself, and over the years we hunted many times together. It is this relationship that takes me each year, three or four times, to the wonderful Czech Republic.

Here, on one of his family's many hunting estates, friends and clients assist in a two-day driven game management hunt. We base ourselves in Prague, the capital city, and stay in a comfortable, somewhat quirky, floating hotel on the River Vltava. From here it is only a 40km drive, south west, to the small Central Bohemian town of Dobris, where we hunt the 20,000-hectare estate that surrounds it.

For many years prior to this, I organised driven boar trips to Poland, where a team of 10-12 Guns would surround a thicket stage plantation, and a short drive would produce either immediate action or nothing much at all. Six to eight drives in one day was exciting but arduous and we spent more time driving in the 'bonanza' (a coach pulled by a tractor) than we did actually stood on our peg. They were good times and I have good memories, but it wasn't until I started attending the Czech organised hunts that I found something more preferable, and more in tune with my own ethos.

The Czechs run a very strict and well-organised hunt for their Austrian estate owner. The format is that of a large 'pressure' hunt, where 30-50 hunters are placed in strategic positions around a block of forestry that can be up to 1,000 hectares in size (2,400 acres). The hunt takes place over two days, and each day there is a morning drive, then lunch, followed by an afternoon drive. With such a large group of people – hunters, beaters, dog-men and tractor drivers – it



TOP: Blaze-orange attired beaters line up in the tableau area to observe the 'opening' of the hunt

ABOVE: Horns are sounded to mark the beginning and end of the hunt

can't help but be very social. The mixture of Austrian, German, Belgian, English and Czech nationalities provides much banter, but there is also a mutual respect for the job at hand and, of course, for the quarry.

On the evening of our arrival at the hotel, we draw our seat number for the hunt, and the rules of engagement are explained in three different languages. There is no doubt in anyone's mind – regular visitors or newly invited guests – just what the requirements are and the safety aspects of shooting live game that may be moving at speed.

The next morning we all have an early breakfast and leave for Dobris, where we arrive at about 8.30am. A traditional hunting horn calls everyone together and the Guns line out in rows facing the beating team across the tableau (an area where the fallen game is brought and laid out respectfully). The *jägermeister* (head gamekeeper) repeats the protocol and, at another sound of the horn to 'open the hunt', we disperse to the waiting tractor and trailer units that will take us to our pegs. Quickly and quietly we are shown our high seat for the drive by an assistant, who explains the direction of the drive and location of neighbouring Guns. The seat is overlooking an open area adjacent to thicker cover. Once up on our seats we are live and the hunt begins!

"THERE IS MUCH BANTER, BUT ALSO A MUTUAL RESPECT FOR THE JOB AT HAND AND, OF COURSE, THE QUARRY"

As part of the management cull we prioritise on wild boar *frischlingen* and *überläufer* (piglings and yearlings up to about 50kg), red hinds and calves, fallow does and kids, mouflon and foxes. All these are included within the day-rate package. However, mature trophy wild boar males (*keiler*), red stags and mouflon rams can be taken and paid for, the price determined by a trophy price list. The only species that is forbidden on our hunt is roe deer – as the numbers are few – and the feral American white-tailed deer that are illegal to shoot on a driven hunt.

The first drive lasts about two and a half to three hours, and teams of beaters and dogs drive the game from several directions in an organised ‘pincer’ movement, trying to keep the quarry within the drives. This procedure differs from the short drives in that the game is moved with minimal stress, meaning that, much of the time, they arrive at the trot rather than the gallop; this enables the hunter to assess the quarry and shot placement for a fraction longer. The hunt covers such a large area that, before and after the beating line has passed, you can see the game going about its normal business and it’s not unusual for the deer to come out and feed naturally. This, I feel, suits the responsible ‘British’ hunter’s psyche and many UK Guns shoot their first driven boar/deer in this way.

Another benefit of the ‘pressure hunt’ is the opportunity to sit in the beautiful Czech beech forests and be at one

with different flora and fauna than that of back home. Black woodpeckers, red squirrels, goshawks, bullfinches and crossbills can all be regularly spotted as you sit quietly awaiting the beating line to pass through your area.

As the drive progresses, we hear shots echoing through the forest and the ‘yap, yap, yap’ of excited hunting terriers driving the quarry, which can appear from any direction and in any number. A group of 20-plus wild boar lolloping towards you through the snow is one of the most exciting hunting scenarios you can imagine; to take your first pig in

RIGHT: The mouflon is a hardy species that can endure low temperatures and tough terrain

“BEFORE AND AFTER THE BEATING LINE HAS PASSED, YOU CAN SEE GAME GOING ABOUT ITS NORMAL BUSINESS”

this fine style would certainly be one to remember. The morning drive finishes at a specified time, normally midday, and we unload and leave our seats to check the game that has been shot. The assistant soon arrives and helps us retrieve our quarry, writing down exactly what we have shot and tagging the game specific to our peg number and colour. If there is any unrecovered game, he will mark the shot and call in the tracking team to give pursuit. It is all very coordinated and done with great responsibility. We

BELOW: Game often approaches at a trot rather than a gallop, allowing the Gun more time to prepare



TOP TIPS

Dressing for the cold with plenty of layers is a must; temperatures below 0°C are a regular occurrence on the December and January hunts.

Weapons and calibres vary considerably, from the massive 9.3mm down to the .30 calibres; the semi auto; Express double rifles; pump and bolt action – they all have their place on this hunt and it’s each to their own.

I have tried many different rifles, but since last year have changed from using my Express rifle to a modern Merkel RX Helix, straight pull in .308 Win, swapping to my .30-06 barrel before my hunting trip, if there’s time.

I top this off with the new Leica Magnus 1.5-10x 42 with illuminated reticule, and 150g Hornady SST ammo. With a five-shot magazine, and one in the chamber, the fast and truly straight pull action of the Helix helps me to shoot quickly, without unmounting the gun or losing my sight on the target.

With a quick Google search you can easily find access to information, organisers and venues that run these shoots in their respective countries.





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(add extra days, hunt on Zero Daily Rate Package)

Dangerous Game Hunts
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Hippo from £5500 5 Full Days/6 Nights
Sable from £3500 5 Full Days/6 Nights
Lion from £4500 5 Full Days/6 Nights
Elephant from £8500 7 Full Days/8 Nights
Leopard from £14,000 10 Full Days/11 Nights
(add extra days, hunt on Zero Daily Rate Package)



arrive back at the central meeting point and all lunch together by an open fire. A carved boiled ham and local sausage is most welcome with a hot drink of coffee or tea. Lunch is short and soon we're back in the forest and being allocated our afternoon seat. The hunt is conducted in a similar fashion to that of the morning, with the drive ending as the sun sets.

We return to the 'tableau' area and the fallen game is brought back and displayed respectfully in lines around an area framed with cut spruce, before small fires are lit. Milan, the *jägermeister*, reads out the bag total and each successful hunter is invited to enter the tableau to receive a small branch of evergreen, a symbol of honour for their successful hunt and the quarry taken. This is presented by the Count and a final horn is blown to end the hunt. Everything is conducted with the utmost respect and dignity and it really is a pleasure to see such tradition being preserved. A few beers are drunk around the fire and hunting stories of the day are told.

Eventually, we depart back to Prague for a night of social relaxation. The next morning is a repeat of the first and another hunt day begins following the same format. Over the two days, and as with any hunt depending on weather, game and shooting ability, we should have a total bag of 60-100 pieces, with the majority being wild boar.



ABOVE: *The day's conviviality continues back in Prague over a nightcap... or two*

To summarise it from an Englishman's perspective, these pressure hunts offer the opportunity to enjoy the solitude of stalking alone, at one with the forest for a few hours; but also offers the camaraderie, banter and social aspect of a driven pheasant shoot day with your mates. For me it ticks all the boxes and I would recommend it to any rifle shooter.

These types of large organised pressure hunts are typical throughout Europe as a way of managing big game and achieving a recognised cull. Be it a Montería in Spain, a Chasse Battue in France, or the Drückjagd of Germany, long may these fantastic hunts continue, in my opinion! **RS**

"THESE HUNTS OFFER SOLITUDE AS WELL AS THE CAMARADERIE OF A DRIVEN PHEASANT SHOOT DAY"



The fallen game is honoured by everyone involved

BLACK MAGIC

From the forests of ancient Germany to the dining tables of aristocracy, the mysterious black roe deer continues to fascinate. Igor Timmermans goes in search of his own...

As long as roe deer exist, colour variations will occur. These can range from dark brown and black, through red-brown, white and mottled tones. This is genetically determined and not influenced by biotope or food. In particular, the black variant has always held a certain magical attraction to man. Firstly, a quick science lesson, so that we better understand the age-old fascination with the black deer.

In roe deer, the gene that transmits the black colour is not dominant but recessive, meaning that the two parents must both be

black to be able to produce black offspring. These deer only have the gene that can pass on their own black colour; this is called homozygous monochromatic. Red-brown roe deer can possess the gene for both their own colour, and that of the black colour; this is called heterozygous bichromatic. Thus, it is possible that two red-brown deer produce a black calf, since both parents could be carrying the recessive black gene, even if it is not evident in their external appearance. When a red-brown roe deer, which does not carry the black gene, breeds with a black mate, the calf

born will still always be red-brown. This is because, as mentioned earlier, there must be two recessive black genes present for the colour to be passed to the young. The chance of producing a black calf is very slim, even if both parents are black; scientists continue to debate this but, still, one calf in three is a high average. Anyway, the roes themselves don't care about the colour of their lovers be they black, white or brown!

Written references to black roe date back to around 1000 AD. There are inventories from the kitchen of Bishop Milo von Minden (d.996)

indicating that, each year, several black roe deer were delivered for him to feast on. Aside from Germany, the Netherlands is the only country in which black roe deer are an integral part of the 'normal' population. In 1950, G.J. van Heek Jr. published the book, *Reewild in Nederland (Roe deer in the Netherlands)* wherein he wrote: "It is approximately 27 years ago when black roe deer were seen in the Netherlands for the first time. Just before the Second World War they were observed more often; during the Occupation however, they virtually disappeared. Today a black roe is still peculiar but not really rare."

In relation to hunting, black roe deer were first documented over 400 years ago. Several ancient manuscripts reveal exchanges of black roe between dukes, kings and bishops. It is known, for instance, that around 1591, Duke Heinrich Julius von Braunschweig donated a number of black roe deer to Landgrave Wilhelm IV von Hessen-Kassel. It is more likely than not that these noble gentlemen would have had their black roe deer caught, mainly, from the countryside and forests surrounding the town of Lüchow in Germany. We know that in ancient times a population of roe

The black roe's antlers don't grow as big as those of the red-brown deer, but their black coat makes them a unique trophy.

deer already existed there. In the pristine forests a number of the deer, with a relatively high proportion of recessive black genes, successfully survived the poachers and hungry soldiers. Duke Heinrich's brother, Bishop von Verden, happened to be in charge of this area, which facilitated the opportunity for various noble gentlemen to barter for deer. Very quickly, the interest in black roe deer spiralled out of control and so, in order to keep up with the high demand and harness the coveted black gene, orders were

»

«



issued to carry out large-scale driven hunts for the live trapping of black roe. Participation was mandatory for all local farmers and, at times, 200 to 300 beaters would be out in the forests, looking for the black roe deer.

Word quickly got around. Every person of good descent, and in possession of a diocese or a castle, wrote letters to establish some

exchange of livestock. Even the Prussian kings could not stand the fact that no black roe deer appeared in their royal hunting field, the Letzlinger Heide. In 1734, the chief forester, von Bornstedt, suggested to his boss (the King) that they catch a few, and consequently a messenger went to every house, demanding the citizens embark on a massive

ABOVE: Anette and her fellow hunters are entranced when they spot their first black deer

BELOW: The fields and forests of Lüchow are at the heart of black roe deer hunting

trapping hunt around the area of Gartow, complete with nets. This doesn't appear to have been too successful, since in October 1750, just 16 years later, the people were summoned once again to scour the fields and woods looking for black roe (to be captured alive). Despite this second effort, there is not a single document indicating that their frantic labours bore any fruits. In the hunting logbooks up to and including 1945, kept by forester R. Herber, not one single black roe deer was reported in this area.

More than a thousand years after Bishop Milo von Minden picked clean the bones of his last roasted black roe buck, the fascination for these mutants still exists. Newsreader, Roelof Hemmen wrote a column entitled, *You're so beautiful, I want to kill you*. This apparent contradiction crossed my own mind when the opportunity arose to hunt a black buck. International hunter, Anette Martens wanted to share in this experience, and I was of the same enthusiasm as a reporter/photographer with a hunter's heart



(or the other way around, if you wish). The authority in this field, Kim Jensen, informed us that some black bucks were allowed to be shot near Lüchow. I am fascinated by this area which is still, even now, the epicentre of black roe deer, and early one morning we ventured into these mysterious fields in former Eastern Germany.

It is still dark when, at quarter past four in the morning, we are awakened by the bellowing of some 80 cows and the rattling of milk cans. The room smells of fresh cow manure, cut grass and mosquito spray. When I tiptoe across the cold tiles to the bathroom, I see the farmer's wife ironing. She has already been busy for hours. There is a healthy tension. For weeks we have been looking forward to this trip. We have recorded all information and continuously looked at the weather reports. It is the first week of August – *blattzeit* (the roe deer rut) as they say over here. By five, Kim is at our farmhouse, and we are downstairs already so not a second is wasted. He knows this area like the back of his hand and can tell where the

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

"When hunting I want to be able to trust my equipment," says Anette. "I always carry my Blaser R8 Professional Success. The calibre, which I can actually use everywhere, is .308 Winchester. My rifle scope is a Zeiss Victory V8 2.8-20 x 56 and is suitable for any hunting situation. Concerning ammunition, I can be brief; because of the good results I've achieved, I only use RWS Evolution Green."

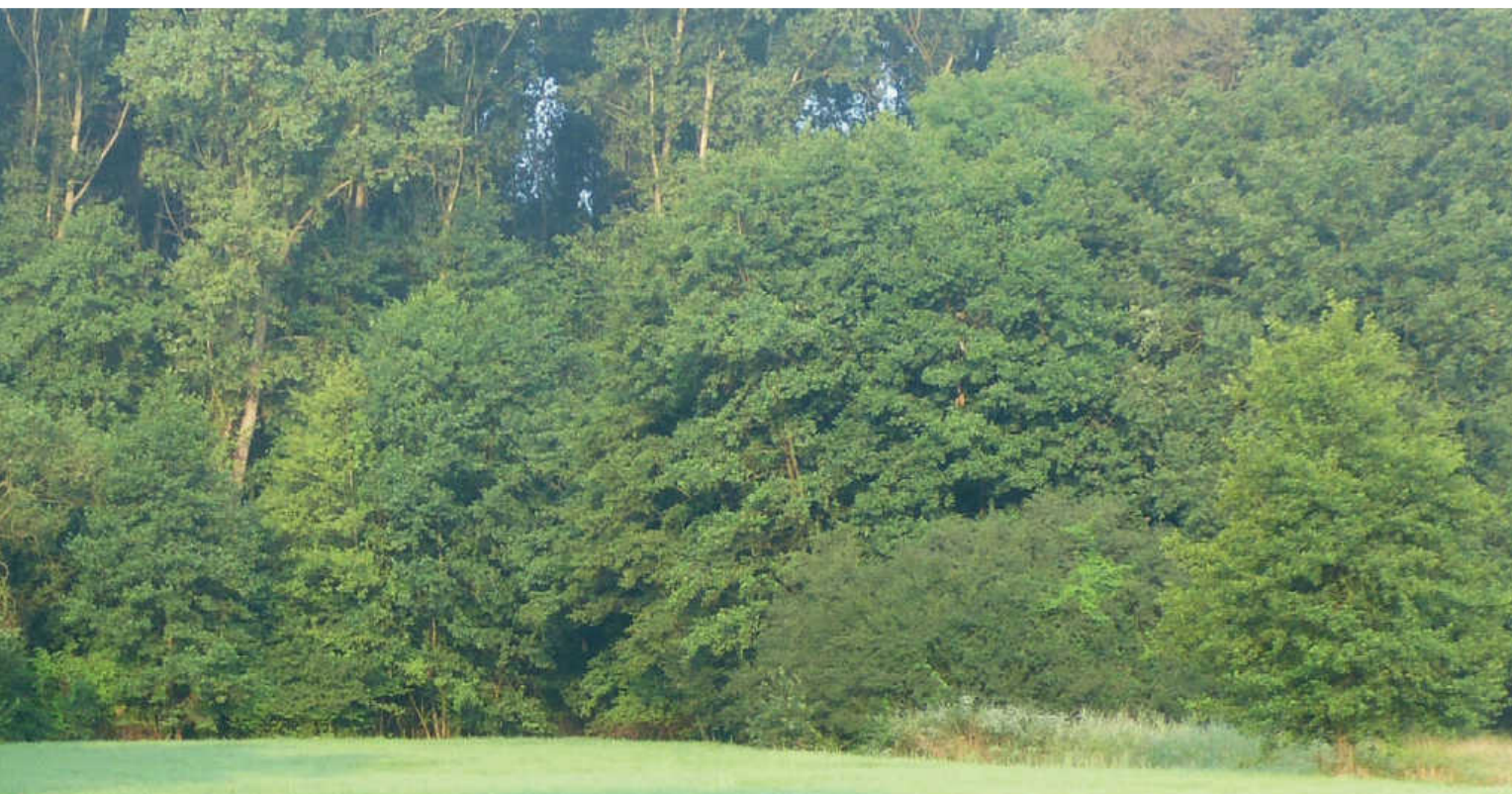
bucks are mainly active. Soon the cars are parked and we are all thoroughly sprayed with Autan insect repellent. We will have to stalk for a considerable distance and, given the opportunity, the cheerfully dancing mosquitoes would eat us raw.

Soon we spot some roe deer. So far we have never seen black ones and thus, to the amusement of Kim,



ABOVE: Anette puts her faith in a Blaser, a Zeiss scope and RWS ammo

we study them in fascination for some time. He scans the area and points at three roe deer that don't hesitate to enter a wide canal, swim »



"ALL THE TIME THERE IS THE SENSATION THAT A BLACK SHADOW MIGHT STEP OUT OF THE FOREST'S EDGE"

«

HISTORICAL NOTES

These notes were found by a Mr. B. Hoekstra of Almelo, recorded from the Dutch hunting magazine *De Nederlandse Jager*:

Eibergen, 13 December 1895

'Today in Borkeloo, a nearly black doe was shot by Mr. J.E. Prakke Jr. It is only recently that roe deer occur here. Farmers observed groups of six and nine roe, and they are becoming more and more numerous.'

Laren, 22 November 1897

'... here a black roe buck was shot...'

Doorwerth, 20 December 1897

'At Doorwerth three roe deer were shot, one of them being completely black.'

Bathmen, 25 October 1907

'In the swamp last Saturday, seven hares, one pheasant and three roe deer were shot, one of which was a jet-black buck.'

across, and shake off the water afterwards. We continue our hunt. I remember a buck with one beam I once saw in the German hunting fields. I was fascinated by it and, because I never spotted him again, have subconsciously chased his shadow ever since. The same feeling came over us now – a mysterious quest for a stealthy animal.

That morning our meeting failed to happen, yet there is the feeling that we are close. All the time there is the sensation that, had a black shadow stepped out of the forest's edge, you would not be surprised. After our afternoon nap, graced with sparrows twittering on the busy farm, we get a message from Kim. He has explored the area and in the scorching heat saw the buck in question pursuing a doe. Our plan is made. We head out with Kim's hunting partner, Jesper Jensen, alongside. Just like Kim, he is a friendly Dane with fabulous expertise. Inch by inch Anette and Jesper shuffle towards the willow and poplar-lined wetland where the buck was last seen.

Nettles and brambles give way and soon we can let off steam in the cool



ABOVE: A still from some footage captured by Igor

of some overhanging branches. We have only just installed ourselves when Jesper nervously starts peering through his binoculars. There's a doe 100 metres away and then, in a flash, a black shape beside her. There he is: a majestic appearance with eyes only for the doe in front of him. In a split second we see him limping slightly – perhaps a spot of bother with the neighbouring buck? Jens uses the Buttolo: "Fiiieepp... fiiieepp... fiiieepp." The buck stretches, stamps his legs. He is irritated and intrigued by this female intruder. With huge jumps and leaps

BELOW: Anette and her bewitching black roe buck

"THE BLACK BUCK IS NO MORE, BUT ALL THE GREATER IS OUR FASCINATION AND ENCHANTMENT"



he comes diagonally towards us. With her rifle on the shooting stick, Anette is ready. A few more steps... and then he stands broadside. With deep respect for such a stately appearance, we witness how he goes down on the shot. The black buck is no more, but all the greater is our fascination and enchantment.

The fact that black roe deer no longer enjoy royal patronage became painfully obvious when we chatted with a local farmer. He told us that he had shot a fair number of black roe. He selected his quarry based on body weight and thus, almost by definition, shot many black roe simply because they tend to be in a lesser condition. He had them at home on the wall and, when asked, he showed them to us. In a long line of little bleached skulls he pointed at some trophies and said: "Those were black."

Igor's hunting trip was booked via Kim Jensen. For more information, email sortbuk@live.dk 

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	Score (40 shots at 50m)	All in group size	Expanded bullet diameters (mean average of x and y axis)
ELEY subsonic hollow .22LR			
	415.8	24.7 mm	9.945 mm
RWS Subsonic HP .22LR			
	406.9	33.2 mm	9.825 mm
Fiocchi Subsonic .22LR			
	395.9	40.1 mm	8.97 mm
Winchester Subsonic .22LR			
	401.0	38.0 mm	9.35 mm
Remington Subsonic .22LR			
	384.6	68.8 mm	8.485 mm
CCI Subsonic HP .22LR			
	390.5	42.0 mm	5.64 mm

TIPPING POINT

Hornady has developed a revolutionary technology to produce, what it is calling, “the best bullets we’ve ever built”

It's not often that a new product comes along which is truly worthy of the word 'revolutionary', but in the case of Hornady's new bullet technology, it is genuinely deserved. For what Hornady has discovered and created has turned the bullet market on its head – or should that be tip...

When, several years ago, Hornady began a project to build a new bullet, the team had no idea of the challenges they faced, the discoveries they would make or where it would lead them.

With a bullet that they believed was ready to launch, they embarked upon the last of their Doppler radar testing (a programme which gives engineers a complete flight path of the projectile). They were able to dig into the drag

curves of the bullet they were building and discovered that the drag was changing rapidly at high velocities, which it shouldn't have been doing. They came to the conclusion that a proportion of the bullet was changing shape in flight and causing a drop in ballistic coefficients (BCs).

The 'lightbulb moment' came when they realised that the tip was deforming and melting in flight, increasing aerodynamic drag and reducing the BCs.

They began looking into the different materials that could be used for the tip and arrived at a material that could handle elevated temperatures for longer periods of time – and so the truly revolutionary ELD-X was born.

RIGHT: An illustration of an ELD-X bullet in cross section

BELOW: The new Heat Shield polymer tip is heat resistant, resulting in higher levels of consistency



The ELD-X provides improved accuracy at all ranges



PICTURE: TWEE MEDIA

\\THE 'LIGHTBULB MOMENT' CAME WHEN THEY REALISED THAT THE TIP WAS MELTING IN FLIGHT\\

THE BULLET

The ELD-X (Extremely Low Drag – Expanding) bullet is a technologically advanced, match accurate, all-range hunting bullet featuring highest-in-class ballistic coefficients and consistent, controlled expansion at all practical hunting distances.

All manufacturers' conventional polymer tips in high BC bullets melt in flight. Hornady engineers discovered that conventional bullet tip materials in streamlined, high BC bullets melt and deform. Although not a significant issue affecting moderate BC conventional tipped varmint and hunting bullets, aerodynamic heating causes BC reduction and degradation of accuracy, particularly at extended ranges (400 yards plus).

To counter this effect, Hornady identified a heat-resistant polymer and developed the patent-pending Heat Shield tip. This revolutionary new tip creates the perfect meplat (tip) with exceptionally consistent results from bullet-to-bullet and lot-to-lot.

HOW IT WORKS

At conventional range (0-400 yards),

the ELD-X bullet is designed to continually expand throughout its penetration path. Upon impact, the thin nose section of the bullet peels back and sheds material until it reaches the thick shank of the bullet jacket where the InterLock ring works to keep the core and jacket together. The remaining heavy shank of the bullet continues to drive forward and expand for extremely lethal results.

Available as component bullets or in factory loaded ELD-X Precision Hunter ammunition, ELD-X bullets are 'heavy calibre' and designed for maximum ballistic coefficients; the highest levels of accuracy consistency; and extreme lethality at all practical hunting distances. **RS**

For more information, visit www.edgarbrothers.com or call 01625 613177.



IN SEARCH OF THE HOLY GRAIL

The idea of a bullet that delivers consistent high-velocity, close-range performance but also has the design that allows expansion at extended range and wrapped in a package with benchmark-setting ballistic coefficients and improved accuracy is pretty appealing. And Hornady says it has just delivered it.

It was really interesting talking to Hornady's technical guys about the new bullet. It seems that they surprised themselves during this process.

The Doppler radar allowed them to gain data from the whole bullet flight – not just a limited section as with many lab tests.

They genuinely had no idea that tip deformation was occurring and by addressing that issue have seriously improved the bullet's performance through the air. But that is only part of the tale. The promise of a hunting bullet that performs lethally at all ranges is also big news.

The lessons learned in the development of the ELD-X have ramifications beyond this new product line. Realistically, this knowledge will change the way they design many of their bullets in future, so this technology could improve a whole range of offerings.

Improved accuracy at all ranges; consistent performance at all ranges. It sounds great. We haven't had the chance to field test the ELD-X in order to verify these claims, but rest assured, that job just went to the top of the list. Watch this space.

Dom Holtam

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



ELD-X (Extremely low drag – Expanding)

- Best-in-class BCs
- Verified by Doppler radar, the Heat Shield tip defies the effects of aerodynamic heating and retains its shape to maintain the highest in-class BC over its entire trajectory
- Match-accurate hunting bullet
- Streamlined secant ogive with optimum boat-tail design, plus highly concentric AMP bullet jackets, plus patent-pending Heat Shield tip combine for radically superior aerodynamic efficiency
- Devastating conventional range performance
- With high velocity, 0-400 yard impact, the bullet continually expands throughout its penetration path. The thick shank of the jacket and high Interlock ring keep the core and jacket together providing 50-60% weight retention
- Best extended range terminal available
- Upon low velocity, 400-plus yard impacts, Heat Shield tip drives backward into bullet to initiate expansion. Exhibiting expansion with a large and 85-90% retained weight that provides deep penetration and large cavities. Available as component bullets or in-factory loaded Precision Hunter ammunition

CZ 750 S1 M1



CZ 557 Sporter



CZ 557 Synthetic



CZ 550 Magnum Standard



CZ 527 Varmint



CALIBRES AVAILABLE

CZ750 S1M1 .308 Win **MSRP from £2,693**

CZ557 Sporter .243 Win, 6.5 x 55, .270 Win, 7 x 64, .308 Win, .30-06 **MSRP from £759**

CZ557 Synthetic .243 Win, 6.5 x 55, .308 Win, .30-06 **MSRP from £743**

CZ550 Magnum Standard .375 H&H, .416 Rigby, .458 Win Mag **MSRP from £1,132**

CZ527 Varmint .17 Hornet, .204 Ruger, .223 Rem "CZ 527 American with sporter barrel also available in above calibres plus .22 Hornet as well as LH in .204 Ruger & .223 Rem **MSRP from £909**

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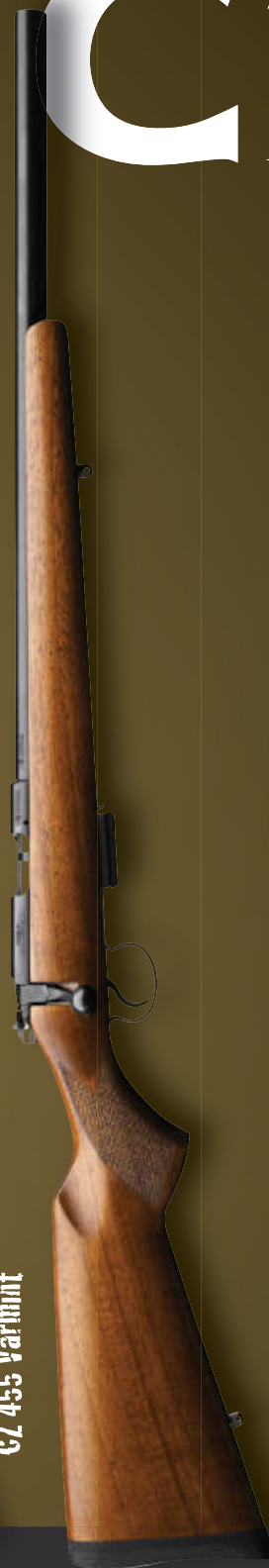
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SHOOT BETTER

THIS MONTH: Shooting position

READY, STEADY? SHOOT

Andrew looks at shooting positions that work in the field

In the last few minutes of a potentially successful stalk the hunter is faced with choosing the best shooting position to make the shot. In reverse order of steadiness, these are: standing unsupported; standing supported; kneeling with or without use of additional support; sitting supporting the elbows with the

knees; or prone. Prone can involve using a sling for support, or a bipod, rucksack or landscape feature for additional steadiness.

The best position is the one that best supports the rifle at the moment of the shot, while also considering the accuracy required to do the job. This is vital; taking five minutes to build a

perfect rest to allow pinpoint accuracy is no help if you only needed to hit a dinner plate-sized area and the quarry left four and a half minutes earlier.

A quick scan of shooting-related social media sites will often give the impression that if the bullet does not hit within one centimetre of the aim point all is lost. In my experience, and

BELOW: *Sitting on your heel when in a kneeling position aids stability*



PICTURES: HELENA VENABLES

Why not have a go at making your own set of shooting sticks? HuntersVermin shows you how in this easy to follow tutorial using cheap materials: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqsQjpx87zo>



MEET THE TEAM

Renowned for being one of the UK's top rifle shooting instructors, Andrew Venables has over 35 years of experience in shooting training, wildlife management and hunting. In October 2015 he was appointed as the first non-German instructor to the Blaser Academy and has also provided firearms training for UK police constabularies and government departments.



in the experience of the majority of animal managers, a reasonable shot taken in two to four seconds of the decision to shoot is far more effective than a 'perfect' shot that went unfired because time and nature had moved on.

George S. Patton, a United States Army general, once said: "A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week." In hunting, the decision to shoot from the chosen position needs to be the start of a considered violent action to bring about the timely humane death of the quarry. Last month, we considered mindset – creating the confidence to make the shot from the chosen position by making it familiar through practice. This month, we consider the pros and cons of the positional choices available.

\\ ENSURE YOU HAVE GOOD CHEEK WELD, WHICH IS VITAL IN UNSUPPORTED SHOOTING //

STANDING

The standing position is generally required when time is short. The body and feet should be at around 45 degrees to the quarry; the position should be upright, if possible; the core stable; and the feet should be some 50cm apart and well grounded. If a large-calibre rifle is being used, the weight should be slightly off the trailing heel to aid assimilation of recoil; if it's mid calibre, just stand upright.

Mount the rifle as slowly as possible. Firstly, because rapid movement frightens game, and secondly, because a slow mount will aid stability and allow the shot to sight correctly and break more quickly once the butt is in the shoulder. Ensure you have good cheek weld, which is vital in unsupported shooting. If using open sights, aim by moving up onto target; if using a red dot or cross hair then mount slightly high and settle down onto the target, pausing in the kill zone and firing. In any case, reload in the shoulder with the quarry in sight in case a second shot is needed quickly. The trigger should be pulled more than squeezed, which is why we considered the position of the hand so carefully last month.

If the standing position is to include sticks of some sort, all the points above apply. However, I generally find using sticks means I mount to the

quarry and move from left or right into the kill zone for the shot, pausing momentarily to make the shot. Most pictures of people shooting with sticks seem to show them leaning forwards, often with their backside stuck out. This is not helpful. If the sticks seem a little short, spread your legs wider apart at 45 degrees and keep your back straight and your backside tucked under. This will not only improve your stability but also ensure you can wait for the shot without undue strain. We practise this a lot at WMS Firearms Training and most of our clients find they can make truly good shots using the technique.

Occasionally, we identify a game changer at WMS; last year we bought a set of Hammond Quadpod (now the Viperflex Quadpod) shooting sticks and started to develop their use in standing positions. The results are spectacular. Not only have we found using them incredibly effective at the usual ranges of 50-100m, they also make considered shots possible at deer kill zone-sized targets at ranges normally reserved for prone shooting using bipods and back bags. After some practice, we now find nailing steel gongs is possible at 300m and further.

KNEELING

In woodland, you often find a deer browse line one to one-and-a-half



TOP: Mount the rifle as slowly as possible when standing and shooting unsupported

ABOVE: Take a wider stance if the sticks seem short

LEFT: When standing and using sticks, mount to the quarry and move from left to right

metres off the ground. If you kneel, you can see much further and more clearly under the leaf line. If you are shooting unsupported, place the offhand forearm on top of the appropriate knee to give some support to the shot. If using sticks, or a handy tree or branch to support the off-hand, then swap knees and put the trigger-arm elbow on top of that one. This means you have both arms supported and the shot will be easier to make.

It's possible to use the side of a shooting stick leg about halfway down if it is set up for standing. This is much »

« quicker than altering the length of the sticks, unless you have Trigger Sticks which offer almost instant height control. If you are flexible enough to sit on your heel, this is all the better for added stability.

SITTING

Using the sitting position works for me in hill and open-ground shooting when a shot downhill is required, when vegetation prevents prone shooting, or in woodland when I have decided to sit under a tree and watch the world go by. I am not flexible enough to sit cross-legged, but if you are, then it works. When sitting, I support my elbows on the inside of my knees, pushing my legs together to adjust height and aid stability. If you can, use your sticks with the fore-end hand, which further supports the position, as does any handy branch, rock, stump or a well-placed rucksack.

PRONE

The prone position, on reflection, is the one I have used most in practice and least when hunting... oops. I've taken steps to address this and now I zero prone or at the bench then check the zero and practise in all the above positions and more. When shooting prone with a bipod, many people extend the bipod to the maximum if it is an 8 to 14-inch version. I find this too tall for best results, leaving the stock too high for the off-hand at the heel to rest on the ground while gripping the butt between thumb and forefinger. On level ground the correct bipod height for an average-sized rifle shot is about 10-12 inches. The bench rest models are four to eight inches and the sitting versions, 16-30 inches.

Shoulder the rifle and then spread the elbows to find the correct height, which should be as low as you can comfortably go. The body should be at about 25 degrees to the rifle and target, with elbows, chest, hips, knees and feet flat on the ground and fully relaxed. Be wary of vegetation, sticks or rocks below the sight line but in the



TOP: Use your fore-end hand to hold the sticks

ABOVE: Rest your elbows on the inside of your knees

bullet's path. The former will deflect and unbalance the bullet; the latter could shower you and any spotter with metal and stone fragments.

When mountain hunting, I haven't generally used fixed bipods. If you have to ride a horse with a slung rifle, the bipod will eat a hole in your shoulder on the first day. On rocks, heather and peat hags a well-packed and placed rucksack seems to work better than a traditional bipod, which also adds weight and therefore is contrary to the principles of mountain hunting. An excellent superlight alternative that can be removed instantly is the magnetic carbon fibre Javelin Bipod from Spartan Precision Equipment.

If the rifle is a magnum calibre such as .300wm or larger, the forehand may be best used on the fore-end to support and grip the rifle and control recoil. If you're relaxed and well practiced it may be of most use in the butt heel grip position. Experiment to see which works best for you and your rifle.

Whatever the position, if the rifle recoils a lot, check your eye relief – a

three-finger wide gap between scope to eyebrow is the safe minimum. Be sure the rifle is properly in your shoulder and that your cheek is tight on the comb, not hovering over it.

Whichever position you choose, shooting aids like sticks, bipods and back bags are there to aid good shooting technique, not to replace it or cover up bad habits.

Practising shooting without any aids and just using a rifle and a sling will highlight faults. Correct them before going out to buy apparent solutions that are no more than a comb-over on a bald head. **RS**

Next month:

The use of slings and how to safely shoot from vehicles and high seats

CONTACT

To find out more about Andrew and WMS Firearms Training:
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CULL OF DUTY

Brent reminds us of the deer stalker's ethical responsibility, and recalls stalking an elusive doe through the wet Scottish forests, his empty freezer serving as motivation





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We are now in the roe doe season and it is time to do the annual winter cull. An essential role of being a deer stalker is understanding the ethics of deer management. This varies all over the UK and usually it depends on the type of ground you are stalking on and what you want to achieve from the population of deer you have.

In south-west Scotland, where I am based, it is primarily commercial forestry and hill farming. So one of the main reasons to have a cull plan is as a result of having young trees in the forest and wanting to control the number of deer in order to protect them. Sitka spruce and Norway spruce are two of the main trees planted here. Pine and broadleaves are also planted on the edges of the forest to give the block a variety of trees.

Browsing causes the most significant impact. The tendency of roe to eat the most succulent parts of plants brings them into conflict with the forest managers. Because they are so very selective, this can mean intense damage to favoured plants, such as broadleaved and plantation trees and coppice, with moderate damage to a wide range of other plants, and some left largely untouched. When roe deer browse the tree they go for the lateral bud that is the leader; nipping the end off this turns the tree into a brush. As a result, when it comes to management, we have to focus on these newly planted areas or the replanted blocks throughout the winter and control the deer numbers. This is

RIGHT: A roe deer feeding on leaves, or 'browsing'



PICTURE: PAUL HOBSON

The management of deer is necessary to control the substantial impact they have on woodland vegetation.

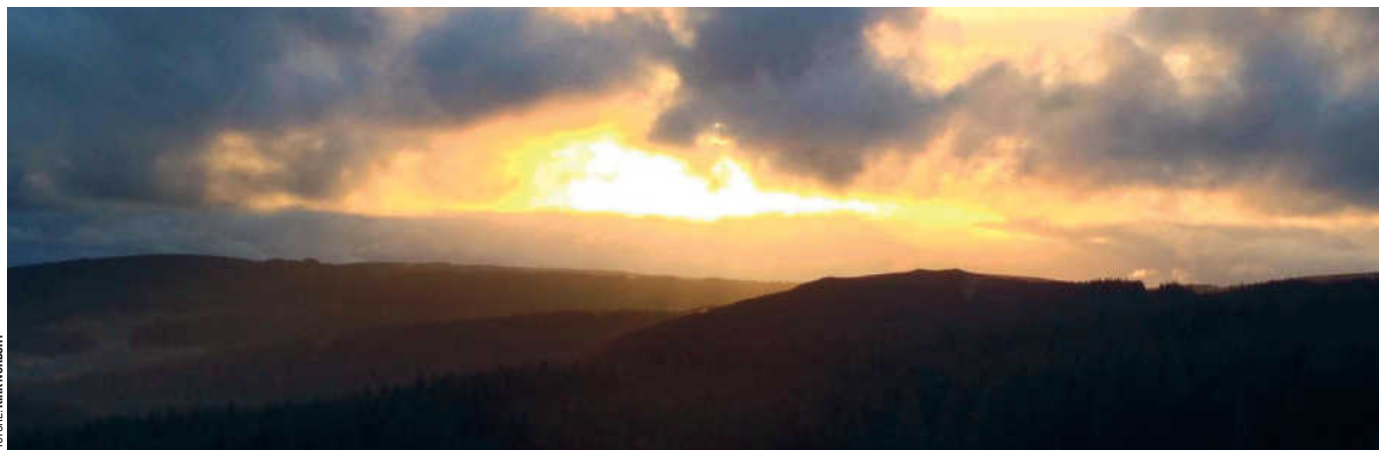
BELOW: Land in the area of Scotland where Brent lives is mainly used for commercial forestry and hill farming

one of the main jobs we do at Strahanna Stalking as a lot of the forests have newly planted areas.

Not all forests have young trees. Some can be big blocks of mature

forest and, here, you can be more selective on what you take out. Usually on these types of areas I will only take out single does. This is mainly because I want to take out the old

"BECAUSE ROE ARE SO VERY SELECTIVE, THIS CAN MEAN INTENSE DAMAGE TO FAVOURED PLANTS"



PICTURE: KIRK HOBBS



“SHE DROPPED
ON THE SPOT;
IT WAS A NICE,
CLEAN SHOT”



PICTURE: KIRK NORBURY

does that haven't produced any fawns, and yearling does that are for the freezer. When we start to get to January/February time, I will shoot a few fawns, as they will have got bigger. It's also a good time to look for any weak fawns that haven't done well through the winter, and if needs be I will take them out, too.

The farmlands surrounding the forests only have sheep and cattle on the fields. Roe deer don't cause any problems to the farmers here, as they are not grazing animals, so they do not pose a threat. Also, roe deer don't like

ABOVE: Brent's roe deer eluded him for some time, but he finally got his shot

to mix with other species, especially sheep. It is very rare to see them amongst sheep. I have only seen it once and even then the roe doe didn't take her eyes off them!

One of the forests I stalk on is a mature forest, and one morning last year I was out looking for a single roe doe for the freezer. It was a cold and windy start to the morning. I decided to stalk along a forest edge on the sheltered side as I had a good feeling

that this would be where the roe deer were. Next to me was the farmland; the sheep had been moved away, so there might have been a chance of one wandering through the field. Mostly they don't go too far away from the forest when they are out feeding.

On this particular stalk, I saw five roe deer, and only one of them was shootable, a yearling doe. I was laid down and she stood 130m away, near the forest but behind a stone wall. I couldn't get a shot on her – she was always hiding. Then she went down into a dip and back into the forest. After she left, I saw two more roe deer along the forest, but far in the distance, and they, too, walked in.

My plan was to go back to the same area in the afternoon. After seeing all of this activity, I felt I had a good

chance. I had only spooked two of them so they should come back out to feed in the afternoon. So I went back and walked the same route again. The weather wasn't as nice as the morning; a slight drizzle of rain was in the air. I hadn't seen anything until I stalked near to the area where the yearling doe had stood earlier.

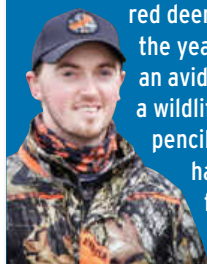
Just as I got there I saw movement underneath the trees. I grabbed my binoculars quickly to see what it was; it was the yearling doe! I got ready and laid down. She was walking straight towards me. I couldn't see all of her because she was behind a bank. I waited for her to come over the bank and had my eye ready, looking through the scope to take the shot. She walked over the bank, but still, she wasn't completely broadside. I was very steady and comfortable, and she was only 90m away, so I decided to take the shot and hit her in the neck. She dropped on the spot; it was a nice, clean shot. In the end, she was only 20m away from where I had spotted her that morning.

As I started to gralloch her the heavens opened, and it started to rain hard. She was in great condition with a lot of fat around the kidneys. That winter hadn't been harsh, so most of the deer I had seen were in good nick. What a result – a perfect deer for the freezer. **RS**

MEET THE TEAM

Brent Norbury is 24 years old and has been hunting for most of his life. He moved to the Galloway Hills in south-west Scotland when he was 17. Brent is a full-time deer stalker at Strahanna Stalking, taking clients out for roe and

red deer throughout the year. He's also an avid fox shooter, a wildlife/hunting pencil artist and has a passion for hunting in Scandinavia.



Generally, roe are the easiest of the deer species to cull as their habits are fairly predictable.



YOUR PERFECT SHOT



ALISON DARBY: *Me and my other half went stalking in the height of the roe rut. We walked for hours, finally coming across some does*



CALLUM HEPBURN



PAUL LITTLE: *Me and my friend, David Beer, on a sika deer stalking trip in Ireland*

Here are some of this month's entries for our exclusive photo competition to win a magnificent Leica Magnus 1.8-12x50 riflescope. Send us your 'perfect shot' for a chance to win...

For most of us, shooting is only a part of why we love our sport. Being in the great outdoors – whether seeing dawn break in bluebell woods or lying on a crag in the Highlands watching stags fighting – is all part of the appeal.

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most evocative images we see these days. What we want is for the image to capture the very essence of why we are so passionate about our sport.

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DANIEL ABBOTT

LISA ILLSTON: My first time stalking and I got two bucks. It is a day I will never forget



DAVID TURNBALL: The Garth Mountain, Wales



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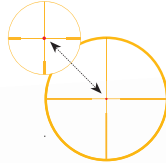
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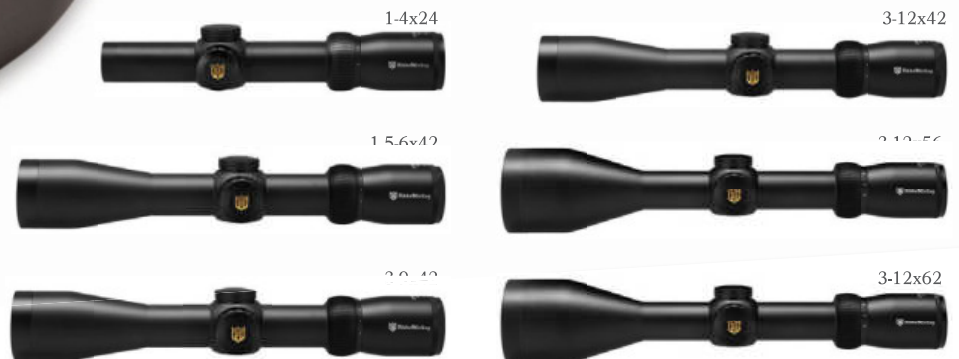


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No.4 Reticle



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ETE Microlux optical coatings are added to the lenses to reduce the reflection of light by the lens surfaces, ensuring a brighter scope in low light conditions when target acquisition is critical.



OPTICS TEST

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GAME CHANGER

Chris Parkin puts Swarovski's new X5i scope through its paces and discovers there's more to this long-range package than meets the eye

When optical manufacturers start discussing long range these days, it is often because they have seen the sales success of the concept and realised they have some of the technology to make it happen. So often, I see a brilliant concept badly flawed by one missing detail, and of all the manufacturers I thought unlikely to approach this arena, it was Swarovski.

Well, how wrong I was, because not only have they approached this field, but they have developed not just a suitable riflescope, but one that has been subtly and fully integrated into a range of equipment that encompasses all requirements of the long-range shooter (note that I say shooter, not hunter). These are:

- Finding your target, ranging it and assessing it (using binoculars).

- Having an optic with sufficient magnification and a suitable reticle to aim the shot; it requires clarity to define the picture to a high level and must also have reliable mechanical adjustment quantity to dial the shot solution or aim off.

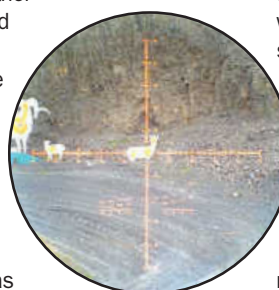
- Long-range shooting is equally about a spotter. He or she is often actually the 'boss' when it comes to taking such shots and they need a spotting scope to see the fall of shot (splash) from the bullet and take into account the effect of wind so that a follow-up shot can be executed quickly, within the same wind condition, if possible, and accurately re-calculated.

I saw the new X5i scope at IWA in March and wasn't completely convinced, as it wasn't really presented as a symbiotic package; and where they had remained in the second focal plane, strangely going back to Minutes Of Angle (MOA) rather than Metric mRad adjustments, and also staying with a 30mm tube, I wasn't that excited and thought the concept a little flawed.

Move on six months and I attended the launch of the product to UK dealers at WMS Firearms Training in Wales and was greeted by a very well-defined concept, thoroughly thought through, and I was looking forward to using it at the premier

ABOVE: Various calibres up to .338 Lapua were shot as far as 900m on the day; there was no shortage of elevation travel on any rifle

BELOW: Illumination intensity is quickly variable to suit light conditions and targets on the STR 60



UK facility for optics and rifle testing.

We were treated to a full product briefing and given various technical facts about the products. It was stressed to us how Swarovski engineers had worked particularly hard on the spring system that holds the erector tube within the body tube, to ensure that when the turret adjustment screws release pressure against the erector tube, it will reliably remain in hard contact and not stick in position, so avoiding tracking issues. I had seen a scope a few weeks previously and although quite logical to use, the revelation that a special Multi Tool is supplied to aid zeroing a turret set-up was a pleasant addition to its superficially complex, yet in use actually straightforward, controls. Each full turn of the turret in the scopes, calibrated with 1/4 MOA clicks, provides 20 Complete Minutes of elevation and with between 86 and 122 MOA on offer, from total internal mechanical travel on the 3.5-18x50 and 5-25x56 models, Swarovski had really impressed me with just the click 'feel'. »



« It seemed a little strange that in these days of metric adjustment values in the cm@100 or mRad systems, they had taken a step in the opposite direction to their normal approach. The MOA unit certainly appeals to the US domestic market with its approximate equivalent to inches/yards. Where the system does trip itself up a little, in the same way that 5mm clicks do elsewhere, is that if you go for $\frac{1}{8}$ MOA clicks on the 5-25, you have to mathematically deal with a rather awkward 12.5 MOA per turn, and this is not ideal. Personally, I think $\frac{1}{4}$ MOA is fine and the longest distance shots in the world are generally done with the coarser 0.1mRad clicks seen on the true tactical scopes on the market to prove this anyway.

Reticle offerings are plentiful and all but the Plex offer graduated aim-off marks to accommodate distance and wind. They agree with the MOA turret values, but only at full magnification as the reticle is in the second focal plane. It's good that they match the turrets, but any shooter wanting to grab a quick aim-off solution lays himself before the gods as he squeezes that trigger, carefully aiming off and at the last second and fluffs the shot as his brain's 'alarm' goes off, and flags up the question, 'what magnification was I set on?'

Illumination is provided in the usual Swarovski fashion with a battery above the eyepiece and a spare under the parallax dial. On/off and brightness are altered by two flush-mounted buttons atop the ocular body and the day/night switch from the Z6i has been omitted. There is no tilt/cant sensor for auto off and one area where Swarovski is criticised is the illumination unit atop the ocular bell that precludes the fitting of rear-mounted NV units, but horses for courses.

THE FULL PACKAGE

The show wasn't all about the X5 scope and what really got me excited was seeing how Swarovski is thinking laterally, not just about the scope for long-range shooters but also range to target and spotting fall of shot.

Now, let's immediately separate shooting and hunting and assume we are engaging inanimate targets here. For any long-range shot, the first consideration is the distance to target and the EL Range binoculars have that very firmly covered. In brief, they are impeccably fine optically, excellent



PICTURES: CHRIS PARKIN



TOP: The spotter plays a key role in long-range shooting

ABOVE: Setting up the turret is not as complex as you would expect and functionally is superb with gentle but well-defined clicks

ergonomically and without doubt a premium item. One ping gets you the range to target. The latest Field Pro package EL Range has a few ergonomic updates like quick-release strap and flush-fitting silent-use objective lens caps.

Second, you have to take account of all ballistics and wind and the latter cannot currently be accounted for by any tool other than black magic and the dark arts of judgement and experience, even anemometers only measure the wind at your location, not for the entire flight path to the target. So range, wind and ballistics accounted for, what is next?

SPOTTING SCOPE: SPOT ON

At WMS we were able to try all of those things, applying adjustments to the scopes, and, to complete the

Swarovski attack, we got to spot the fall of shot with the very new and divine (yes, I'm aware I'm gushing) STR 80 spotting scope.

Swarovski, it has to be said, was a birder's paradise long before they talked to shooters, and all their spotting scopes across the ranges give bright, crisp images with colour rendition the keenest twitcher would crave when identifying his 'lesser spotted this' from a 'greater crested that' in any light conditions. The STR 80 breaks this mould by adding an illuminated reticle in the first focal plane. Regardless of magnification, this can be aimed directly at the target, and as the bullet flies will probably catch the swirl of the air it disrupts, as well as the impact on target, the hole in the paper, or

\\ SWAROVSKI HAS REALLY CHANGED
MY OPINION OF ITS APPROACH TO
THE LONG-RANGE MARKET //

»

perhaps the splash in the backstop.

Serious long-range shooters know fast correction of the miss is the key to getting that second round in flight asap, and when the spotter accounts for this (often a harder task than the actual shooting), he/she must immediately communicate the required correction to hit the target. Over distances of beyond 800 yards/metres, the shooter can often have racked the bolt and reloaded the rifle, aimed back on target and be ready to see the splash before the ringing noise of steel returns, but by that time he can immediately respond to his spotter, who is realistically 'in command', to catch the same wind conditions and send another round which will this time hit perfectly.

Now with a reticle in the spotting scope that matches the reticle and adjustments on the rifle, a well-coordinated pair can really get some precision long-range shooting done, as when that splash pops into view three MOA right and one MOA low in the STR80, very little thought is required to communicate the secondary shot solution.

For all those who think calling 'half target left, one target high' works okay, they should try the FFP reticle in the spotting scope. It is quite breathtaking how it speeds matters up and allows you to get two shots fired just a fraction faster, but a fraction that often does make a critical difference in rapidly changing wind. Eyepieces in 20-60 or 25-50W (wide angle) are available separately. The

product is good enough to make your eyes water, and the tears will flow harder when you see the price. It is just magical optically, though. Perhaps in the long term it will make you a better shot and reduce ammo costs. You will want one!

THE VERDICT

Swarovski has really changed my opinion of its approach to the long-range market and in all honesty, the X5i riflescope in 3.5-18x50 format is quite acceptable on a mid-weight hunting rifle. The weight is acceptable, and functions and controls are first rate with an image quality that bathes in the Swarovski reputation; it really is fantastic. As always, stretching the magnification and mechanical limits of a scope comes at a slight compromise, but the engineers have done magical work to get all this mechanical ability within a 30mm tube and retain such optical quality. After all, there are around 15 simple/compound lenses to fit inside that tube and mechanical range of adjustment comes at the cost of the size of the lenses in that internal, unseen erector tube where 91% light transmission is quite an achievement.

Work on the erector spring system has clearly paid off and when you consider that each 'click' only physically moves the erector tube 0.005mm (five microns; bacteria are commonly about three microns) you

CONTACT

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uk.swarovskioptik.com

THE COST?

RIFLESCOPE

X5i Riflescope
3.5-18x50 £2,570
5-25x56 £2,740

SPOTTING SCOPE

STR 80 Spotting Scope
£2,660
plus eyepiece (20-60) £460

BINOCULARS

EL Range Binoculars
8x42 £2,440
10x43 £2,520

can see where your money is going. Okay, the turret is quite large, but it offers great functionality. When viewed in sectioned profile, I think it could be shortened a little, but there are a lot of mechanics inside it.

Were it mine to design, what would I change? Well, there is a further clutch assembly below the base of the external turret and when the collar is lifted (requiring a pointed tool of some type, as your fingernail is too big), it allows a further 10 MOA of negative elevation below zero to be dialled. I don't see the point in this and although it can be useful to sometimes have the ability in an emergency to go below zero, 10 MOA is a lot more than is needed and costs space on that turret. **RS**

BELOW: There certainly wasn't a shortage of premium test kit at WMS, with either a rifle or spotting scope to hand at all times



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The heart of the stock is a reinforced fibreglass structure with aluminium pillar bedding for stock screws.

A three-position safety allows you to open the bolt and unload the rifle even when 'on safe', while the metalwork for action and barrel are classically blued and well finished.

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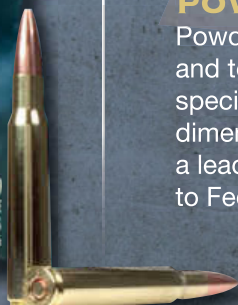
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**OPTION 2 – BALKAN CHAMOIS**

Higher up in the mountains, at between 600m and 1,600m above sea level, the Balkan chamois make their home.

With brown bear, grey wolf and lynx also using the 20,000ha unfenced area, the chamois are wary, secretive and a challenge to stalk. As a result, as with mouflon, you may be required to hunt at longer distances, so training and practice beforehand is much advised.

Artemis boss, Tomo Svetic tells us that when it comes to chamois Croatia has the best genetics of Balkan chamois subspecies. "When we go after chamois we try to get a female or male over six years old, representative or in medal class."

**OPTION 3 – WILD BOAR**

Stalking wild boar on foot is a great thrill and Artemis Hunting have access to some fantastic ground. Editor Dom hunted here a couple of years ago: "Without doubt some of the best foot stalking I have enjoyed and with friendly, knowledgeable guides. We stalked into some huge keilers and getting up close to one of the local brown bears was very exciting."

The hunt will be a combination of 'spot and stalk' on open grassland and woodland edges and high-seat vigils at feed stations. Big trophy animals in the medal class are a distinct possibility – with Tomo reporting the biggest boar they have ever spotted using some of their areas this year.



The hunts will include flights to and from Croatia. The relevant permits for hunting in Croatia will be arranged by Artemis Hunting. Artemis can assist in booking your firearm for travel. You will be collected from the airport at the start of your hunt and returned to the airport for departure.

The hunt will consist of four nights'

accommodation and three days of hunting with Artemis Hunting guides.

Private accommodation on the coast or in mountain hunting lodges will be provided for the winner, with air-con, kitchen, showers and toilets, and all accommodation is situated close to the hunting areas. Food and drink will also be provided.

Tomo advises a minimum calibre of 6.5x55 and a maximum of .300 Win Mag. Traditional UK stalking calibres such as .270, .308 and .30-06 are suitable. Bullets should be soft point – ideally SST or similar.

The climate is very good in Croatia with warm temperatures and generally dry conditions. For autumn hunts (for chamois), Tomo recommends packing a lightweight windproof and waterproof jacket. He also recommends strong leather boots as the rocks are incredibly sharp and unforgiving.

The winner must be a UK FAC holder. 

Chamois hunting is challenging due to the terrain and the elusive nature of the quarry



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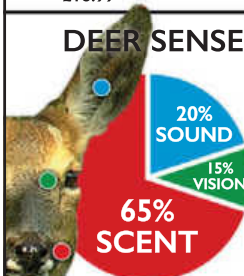
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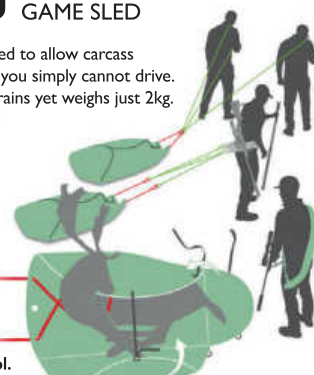
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better, safer and more efficient handling systems. Gradually, deer farmers saw less and less need for darting equipment, and so there was a gradual decline in the number of dart rifles in existence – and the experienced operators required to use them. However, there was still the occasional requirement for access to RCI (Remote Chemical Injection) systems on deer farms, for incidences such as stags becoming locked together by their antlers; becoming entangled in wire or fences; or for the treatment of hinds during calving, where bringing a whole mob indoors to treat one animal could compromise the safety of several calves.

Today, we are seeing RCI equipment coming back into widespread use as part of the professional deer manager's equipment. More efficient and technically superior equipment is popping up in the market and there has been an increase in usage applications. So, why are RCI systems

gaining popularity once again, not only in the deer world, but also amongst other professional animal management organisations, too?

PREFERENCE AND PRACTICALITY; SAFETY AND SERVICEABILITY

Throughout the years, several manufacturers of RCI systems have distributed their wares throughout the world, each claiming superiority in the market for various reasons. Some of the great names in

darting equipment include Palmer, Cap-Chur, Paxarms, Telinject, Distinject, Dan-Inject, and the relative 'new kid on the block', the USA-produced Pneu-Dart. The early dart rifles were pretty crude in comparison to today's high-tech systems – although

many of the old systems are still in operation and still performing fairly well within their relatively limited performance 'envelopes'.

In today's demanding market only

two manufacturers have risen to the surface, still offering highly efficient, reliable and accurate systems, and, unlike the others, have kept up with technology. The survivors are chiefly Dan-Inject and Pneu-Dart. Both are highly accurate, versatile and reliable precision instruments, and the loyal users of each system still vehemently defend their choice, insisting that theirs is the best. In reality, there is little to choose between them; the two systems, as far as build quality, reliability and accuracy are concerned, are on a pretty even keel. However, as far as price is concerned, there is a marked difference – the Dan-Inject system is much more expensive than Pneu-Dart. As far as safety in operation, reliability, and usability is concerned, we believe that the Pneu-Dart system not only has the edge, but is also safest to use. So, you see, the most expensive option might not always be the best option.

»

RCI systems provide a means of stress-free, humane treatment of wild animals and domestic livestock.



"THE EARLY DART RIFLES WERE PRETTY CRUDE IN COMPARISON TO TODAY'S HIGH-TECH SYSTEMS"

RETURN OF THE DART

Mike Allison of Jelen Deer Services takes an in-depth look at the use of Remote Chemical Injection (darting, to you and me) as it creeps back into popular use

In the early days of deer farming, and up until about eight to 10 years ago, most commercial deer farms would have to have some form of darting equipment, or at least access to it. The equipment would be used routinely for treatment of stags, especially big stags, when de-antlering time came around. However, times changed, and with it came the development of better equipped handling systems able to manage and restrain even the biggest stags.

The moment in history where deer farmers became less reliant on dart rifles was in the wake of the development of hydraulic crushes. The New Zealand-made Heenan Workroom became the revolutionary new tool, which allowed farm managers to safely handle any farmed deer, even big stags, with ease.

It was not only the hydraulic crush that influenced the change and made handling large stags easier and safer, but the design and development of



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SAFE DART SYSTEMS

Some of the drugs used in the immobilising of animals can be extremely toxic in humans if accidental exposure occurs. In recent years, there has been much debate about the safety of many drugs, to the point where some vets refuse to even stock, let alone use, drugs such as Immobilon. Whilst we appreciate the risks of using drugs – such as etorphine hydrochloride (Immobilon or M99) – we firmly believe that these substances are only as dangerous as the person using them and/or the systems by which they are administered.

Although most operators are aware of the need for safe practices when handling drugs and loading syringes and darts, we nevertheless have to be mindful of the fact that the risk is always there, and therefore we must be aware of the consequences of accidental exposure. We must also understand how this may occur during dart loading, and reduce or eliminate that risk where possible.

In modern day dart systems there are essentially two variants: darts that need to be pressurised prior to loading in the dart projector; and those that automatically pressurise on impact with the target animal. Within these two categories there are also two sub-categories: single-use (disposable systems) and reuseable (multi-use) systems.

PRE-PRESSURISED SYSTEMS

The typical pre-pressurised system consists of darts that have a drug

containment vessel with a piston that forces the drug down the vessel and out of the needle (once the needle seal has been pushed back by the skin of the animal). Behind the piston is a chamber into which air or gas is injected through a one-way valve. When the dart impacts the animal, the needle seal is pushed back and the air/gas pressure forces the piston forward, thus injecting the drug into the muscle.

Whilst pre-pressurised systems have been in use for decades, many without malfunction, the inherent risks of dart component failure is significantly higher than in impact activated (explosive) systems. The risks are further compounded where there are shortfalls in basic maintenance and care of dart components, or failure to identify damaged components.

THE MAIN RISKS DURING AND AFTER PRESSURISATION ARE:

- 'Slow-flow' leakage of the drug – caused by faulty needle seals, ill-fitting needles or hairline cracks in the dart body. One of the most concerning aspects of this problem is the possibility of slow-flow leakage of the drug in the barrel of the dart projector. When fired – especially into a headwind – there is a strong possibility that aerosol from the leaked substance can be blown over the operator and/or other people in the vicinity.



ABOVE: Mike saw a gap in the market to provide specialist training to a wide range of professionals

- Pressured (jet/spray) leakage of the drug – caused by faulty needle seals or over-pressurisation resulting in needles flying off. This can result in operators being exposed to a high-pressure jet or aerosol spray of the drug. This is especially dangerous when the drug is sprayed into the eyes, nose, lips and mouth, as mucous membranes will rapidly absorb the drug into the blood stream (one of the main reasons for wearing face masks when loading darts).

- Air/gas leakage leading to injection failure – caused by faulty components. One of the main concerns of this event is the possibility of animals having a dart full of drug in them, and no means by which the drug can be injected. This can necessitate another dart being used on the same animal, and present associated additional costs and animal welfare issues. Air/gas leakage can occur quickly or slowly, especially where darts are pressurised and then not used for some time afterwards.

BELOW: The Jelen training course focuses on animal welfare and the risks to human safety



PICTURES: MIKE ALLISON; RIGHT: DAVID LAMER

SINGLE-USE, EXPLOSIVE CHARGED SYSTEMS

These systems have also been in use for many years. They consist of a drug containment vessel and a piston behind which some form of explosive charge resides. This can either be cartridge-type, or a pyrodex disc set into the rear of the piston. These systems are extremely reliable, and we have only had one or two dart failures in over 200 darts fired – both caused by insufficient inertia to activate the ignition.

The system works using the impact created when dart connects with the animal. A striker (hammer) is driven forwards by inertia against a light spring. The hammer strikes the explosive media and, upon ignition, rapidly expanding gas is generated behind the piston. This forces the drug down the length of the drug containment vessel and down the needle into the muscle. A light application of antibiotic

OPERATOR TRAINING

The single most important aspect of operator and animal safety lies in specialist training in live capture and RCI. Jelen Deer Services recognised a significant deficiency in trained operators throughout the UK, and felt that such a deficiency could potentially put human safety and animal welfare at risk. As a consequence, Mike Allison, Managing Director of Jelen Deer

Services, wrote and developed the UK's first and only formally recognised training course in Live Capture & Immobilisation.

The course is an intensive three-day programme, approved and recognised by Lantra Awards, and has resulted in a national network of qualified Live Capture Operators being established, who are able to provide a safe, professional service throughout the UK.

Jelen have provided equipment and/or training to a variety of customers

throughout the UK and Europe including veterinary practices, police constabularies, the Armed Forces, the Home Office, overseas vets, and many wildlife and deer managers.

The course costs £599 and scheduled courses are run in March and September each year, although Jelen can provide bespoke courses anywhere in the UK and Europe for equine or large animal veterinary practices, and a range of other agencies, by appointment.



◀ cream on the needle blocks the exit ports, preventing drug leakage, and has the added benefit of 'treating' the needle wound on entry.

THE SYSTEM HAS A COUPLE OF DISADVANTAGES:

■ **Accidental detonation** – this is generally caused through accidentally dropping the dart. This is generally specific to the older systems, which were sensitive to any moderate impact, whereas the new systems rely on a certain level of impact and requires a head-on impact of the needle with a hard surface.

■ **Rapid injection speed** – the speed of injection from powder-charged systems tends to be very quick, and on single-port needles this can have two effects. The first is that the jet of drug can occasionally propel the dart out of the muscle – a bounce-out. However, because of the rapidity of injection, the drug has almost always been injected before the dart bounces out, especially in small capacity darts. The second is potential muscle damage, although muscle repairs pretty quickly. This can be avoided by using dual-port or tri-port needles which distribute the impact and therefore reduces local injection pressure.

In summary, having used many dart systems over the years, we have come to the conclusion that single-use, explosive charged systems offer the most reliable, the safest, and the least expensive options for the professional live capture and RCI specialist.

ACCURACY AND RELIABILITY

It is imperative that dart projectors –

and their operators – are capable of delivering consistently accurate darts to ensure precise placement, and consequently avoid dart trauma (damage to muscle, bone and internal organs). Consistency in accuracy is not too much of an issue in modern dart projectors, especially those with rifled barrels, which give darts greater stability in flight. However, accuracy can be badly affected by wind, causing mis-placement, and this is compounded by distance. Darting should be avoided in windy conditions or, if darting is absolutely necessary, then the ranges should be reduced as much as possible.

Top manufacturers have carried out much research and development over the years to increase the reliability, and adaptability, of projectors. The CO₂-powered projectors (Dan-Inject, and Pneu-Dart X-Caliber and X-2 Dart Pistol) are virtually maintenance-free, whereas powder-charged projectors (Pneu-Dart Model 389) require regular cleaning as carbon fouling reduces valve function. Failure to properly maintain powder-charged dart projectors is one of the main causes of inconsistency in accuracy.

TELEMETRY SYSTEMS

One of the greatest concerns amongst park owners/managers, especially in areas where there is public access to the land, is the inherent danger of darts being lost or otherwise unrecovered. With transmitter darts available from Pneu-Dart, the possibility of losing darts is virtually eliminated. Specially developed

transmitter receivers can pinpoint darts to within 12 inches from distances of up to one mile. The dart transmitters emit a signal for up to six days.

This technology can also be used to locate immobilised animals in cover at similar distances.

Trials were carried out at several estates, and at Jelen Deer Services HQ, before being used by operators for the capture of wild red deer in Spain and

Denmark. The system has also been successfully used to

recapture feral dogs, where darted animals have travelled up to two miles before becoming sufficiently sedated to allow capture.

CONTACT



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Website:

www.jelendeer.com

ADDITIONAL APPLICATIONS

Whilst it is generally accepted that RCI equipment is used for the immobilisation/live capture of animals, it must be remembered that there are several other applications for which the technology can be used. These include:

CONTROL OF DANGEROUS DOGS/ANIMAL DETERRENTS

The systems are used by several constabularies throughout the UK for the control of dangerous dogs in urban and inner city areas, where the use of riot shield and tasers expose officers to danger, as well as presenting animal welfare issues.

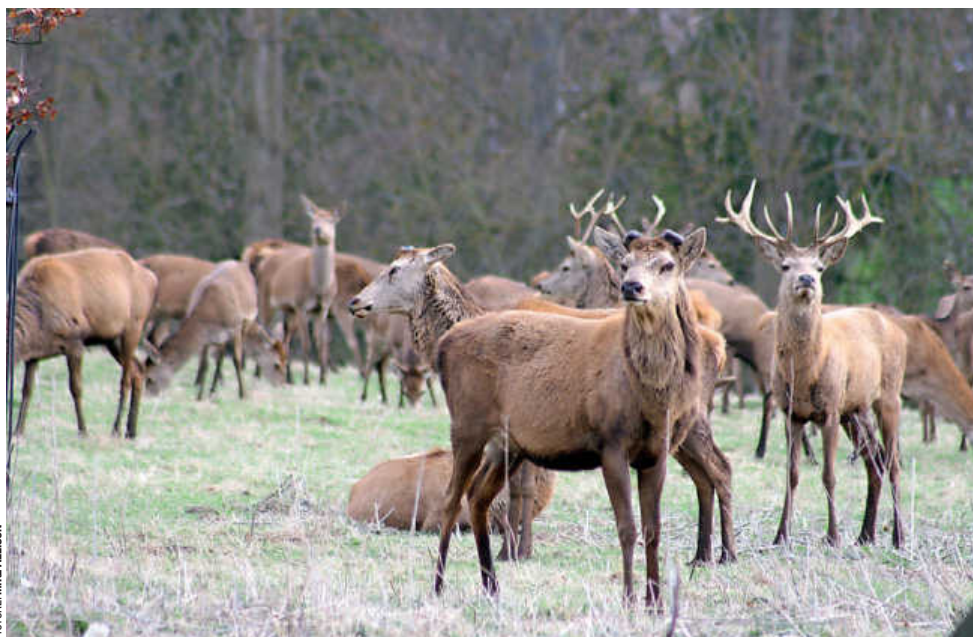
There are also darts available that simply create a loud explosion without causing injury to the animal. This can be especially useful to deter animals from grazing in gardens or sensitive areas. However, use of these darts in built-up areas would not be recommended.

VETERINARY USES

Barbless or gel collar darts can be used to deliver antibiotics or other drugs as part of routine health management, or for specific treatment requirements such as wormers, multi-vitamins, or other injectable solutions, for example, vaccines. They are often used to simultaneously mark the treated animal to avoid accidental repeat treatments, or to identify an animal that requires several treatment applications.

Darts can also be used by vets/keepers for tissue extraction. This can be particularly useful in parks where identification of individual animals is required to identify superior genetics, or for the retrieval of biopsy samples for analysis or disease identification. RS

BELOW: Tissue extraction can be performed by darts, allowing keepers to identify diseases



PICTURE: MIKE ALLISON

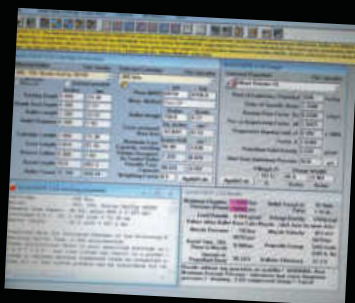
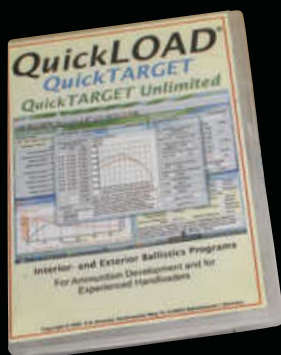


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THE RULES OF THE GAME

Alan Barrell, a member of the National Gamekeepers' Organisation Deer Branch Committee and the NGO's Game Meat Hygiene Course trainer, clarifies the laws on game meat handling

The rules on game meat hygiene might seem complicated to some, and this is an area the National Gamekeepers'

Organisation receives many enquiries about each month. So, in this article, we are going to try to simplify what you the hunter can and cannot do to stay within the law. We are only going to look at the game that is harvested using a firearm, this being a rifle shooting magazine, but, broadly speaking, large game is deer, wild boar, sheep and goats; small game covers pretty much everything else.

DO I NEED TO BE A TRAINED HUNTER?

The National Gamekeepers' Organisation offers training approved by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), which, in most cases, is required by

people who shoot to supply game into the food chain. The NGO's course covers both large and small game. If you take a DSC1 course (with any provider) you will also have to take a game meat hygiene certificate as part of that qualification (unless you already have one and can produce a valid certificate). This will only cover you to supply large game, such as deer, unless you take the course with the NGO, whereupon you will be taught the FSA course which covers you for both. So, who needs what training?

PRIVATE OR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION

If you shoot wild game for your own consumption, or to occasionally give away to family and friends, then you do not need to have a game meat hygiene certificate. In this situation, the game

is not subject to any of the requirements of EU food safety legislation. The key point is that the game is not for sale or supply to anyone else as part of a food business operation.

SUPPLY OF SMALL QUANTITIES OF GAME IN THE FUR TO LOCAL RETAILERS OR THE FINAL CONSUMER

If you are a stalker, or a shoot or estate who is producing game carcasses and then supplying them to the final consumer or to local retailers, then you do not fall under the EU regulations and you do not need to have a game meat hygiene certificate. However, you are responsible for supplying safe food under the Food Safety Act 1990 and Regulation 178/2002. This regulation creates a duty to ensure proper traceability from field to fork, i.e. the place of production to the final place of consumption. It also means that the supplier must meet all food hygiene and safety requirements. The Food Safety Act creates responsibilities not to put unsafe food into the food chain or to falsify describe food. It creates several offences which can be committed where someone breaches these duties; these are disputed in trials at the Crown Court and carry a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

SUPPLY OF GAME IN THE FUR TO APPROVED GAME MEAT HANDLING ESTABLISHMENTS (GAME DEALERS)

If you are intending to sell and supply game to an Approved Game Meat Handling Establishment (AGHE), i.e. a game dealer, then you are required to register as a food business with your local authority, and comply with the general hygiene requirements for primary producers. This includes any

BELOW: The NGO course covers both large game, such as deer, and small game



PICTURE: JACK SCHREINER



PICTURE: NGO

vehicle you might use when supplying a game dealer; your game larder if you use it for storing game before it goes to the dealer; as well as the specific provisions of Regulation 853/2004 that apply to the initial handling of wild game intended for subsequent supply to a game dealer. That regulation basically requires a carcass inspection by a 'trained hunter' and the signed declaration that goes with the carcass. These regulations and the corresponding paperwork are all included and talked through during any decent game meat hygiene course.

A 'trained hunter' is someone who has sufficient knowledge of the pathology of wild game, and of the production and handling of wild game meat after hunting. They will undertake an initial examination of wild game on the spot. Where game carcasses are intended for supply to an AGHE, at least one person from the hunting team must have this knowledge, and have taken and passed a game meat hygiene course.

DIRECT SUPPLY OF PROCESSED WILD GAME MEAT TO THE FINAL CONSUMER OR LOCAL RETAILERS

If you stalk or shoot game and process it in any way, such as selling a deer carcass to the local pub with the skin removed, you are required to register with your local authority as a food business, under Regulation (EC) No. 852/2004. This doesn't include gutting a rabbit or gralloching a deer.

ABOVE: When supplying game, all equipment must be kept clean

RIGHT: You do not need a hygiene certificate if you shoot for your own consumption



PICTURE: CHRIS PARKIN

The regulation states that:

- you are required to comply with the general hygiene requirements;
- you must have in place a food safety management procedure based on HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) principles.

Please note that the requirements are adapted where private dwelling houses or temporary/moveable premises are being used. Advice can be sought from your local authority during registration.

The EU food hygiene regulations regard shooting or hunting of wild game for human consumption as a primary production activity. This means that any individual who shoots game alone, or as a member of a hunting party or a shooting estate which organises shooting of wild game, is considered a primary producer. All participants on the day are classed as hunters, so gamekeepers, ghillies and beaters are all included; spectators are not. As long as one of the participants has a valid game meat

hygiene certificate, then they can conduct the carcass inspection for the entire party; it does not necessarily need to be the person pulling the trigger.

Primary wild game products are the products of hunting. This means in-fur or in-feather game that has undergone no more than the absolute necessary preparation that is part of normal hunting practice. Such preparation is usually the gralloching of large wild game animals, which is carried out either 'in the field' or in a game larder.

GAME LARDERS OR COLLECTION CENTRES

These are generally used for storage of in-fur and in-feather game by individual hunters or by estates. The following activities carried out at game larders are regarded as part of primary production:

- any necessary carcass preparation that is part of normal hunting practice – it is often preferable to do this at the game larder rather than in the field;
- storage of in-fur and in-feather game.



If you operate a game larder of any sort, you should:

- make sure that it has sufficient capacity to cater hygienically for the expected maximum throughput;
- make sure the larder is adequately refrigerated;
- make sure the larder is adequately pest proofed;
- make sure that game is protected against contamination, including from animals and pests;
- keep it clean and, where necessary, disinfect it after cleaning in an appropriate manner;
- use clean or potable water to prevent contamination;
- prevent the introduction and spread of contagious diseases, transmissible to humans through food, and report the suspicion of such diseases to the competent authority;
- ensure that all those who handle game and game meat are in good health

and undergo training in health risks;

- store and handle waste and hazardous substances so as to prevent contamination.

Chilling is important in controlling food safety risks associated with meat. For this reason, wild game must be cooled to no more than 7°C for large game, and 4°C for small game, and within a reasonable time after killing, on a continual cooling curve, and then maintained at these temperatures or below. Large, un-skinned wild game must not be frozen. To maintain these temperatures, you should really run your chiller below these figures.

Transportation of carcasses must be done in a manner that keeps them clean and free from any environmental contamination, such as dirt and unclean water. Also, pests and pets must be kept away from shot game once it reaches the transport stage. It



PICTURE: JAMES MARCHINGTON

LEFT: Carcasses must be transported in a clean environment and kept away from pests and pets

BELOW: An example of how not to transport game – the meat is open to contamination and poses a food safety risk



PICTURE: NGO

ABOUT THE NGO

The
NATIONAL
GAMEKEEPERS'
Organisation

The National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) is the representative body for gamekeepers, stalkers and ghillies in England and Wales.

The organisation is run by gamekeepers for the good of shooting sports and campaigns on a wide range of issues. Because the NGO is run by keepers it has a staunch understanding of what actually goes on in the countryside and on shooting estates from trapping and snaring to deer management.

NGO membership is just £40 per year. The NGO has a dedicated deer branch, firearms advisory service, free legal support from professional solicitors and the membership also includes £10m of third party liability insurance as well as many other member benefits.

To join call 01833 660869 or go to www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk where you can find out more information.

is important to keep the cold chain; if you cool your game down to the required temperature, that temperature must be maintained during delivery.

For more information about game meat hygiene regulations, please visit www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/guidance/wild-game-guide.pdf or email the NGO: info@nationalgamekeepers.org.uk 

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THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

Chris Parkin gives in to the dark side with a Yukon Photon XT 6.5x50 night vision riflescope

I was tempted on a few occasions to pick up one of the low-priced Yukon Photon night vision riflescopes when they first appeared. My golden rule when buying new kit is value for money and, in terms of shooting, what sort of capability you are actually getting for the money you pay. Well, at £400 and with a lot of internet video footage to tempt me, I succumbed.

The Photon had publicly gone through a couple of updates in a short time. Like all items in the modern

digital era, progress is unstoppable and where the original 5x42mm came with a mechanical reticle and evolved to shed its turrets, we are now on a full digital set-up with 30mm tube and 6.5x magnification behind a 50mm objective lens to accept more light.

High-end NV units with in-built Picatinny rail mounts are often a bit of a pain, requiring specialist fittings to get them onto a rifle and then in the correct position to offer the perfect eye relief, which is usually shorter on these devices. With a 30mm tube, the

ABOVE: Chris tried various illuminators for differing effect. Note the pinhole lens cap for daytime usage

Photon is really easy to attach as use of standard scope rings make it simple to fit to 11mm dovetail rails on most rimfires, or the specific mounts for centrefires. Fitting took minutes, remembering to place the unit rearward. There are 60mm of eye relief, which is encapsulated within a soft rubber bellows style shroud to allow the eye to remain undisturbed by any ambient light.

Two AA batteries power the unit, accessible via a screw cap on the top. To the left the 'on' button sits at the



rear of the in-built 810nm IR illuminator and when held in for a second, turns the unit on. Reticle focus is set at the back of the tube with a collar similar to the zoom ring on a regular scope, and once corrected for your eyes, never needs touching again. The internal screen shows a black and white image produced by the 656 x 492 pixel sensor, punctuated in greens and reds by function displays. In normal use only the small lower right battery indicator remains, other than the chosen reticle, six of which are on offer and can be themselves projected in white, green or red. Further presses of the main on/off button will initiate

the four-stage on-board eye-safe Laser illuminator. Intensity level is displayed on the lower left of the screen with one, two, or three dots next to the 'IR' symbol or 'off' entirely. When charge begins to diminish, the internal indicator drops to halfway and if dangerously low, the tiny green LED above the on/off switch changes to red.

There is a dial beneath the illuminator with a central button. Holding this button down momentarily initiates the menu screen and it's quite intuitive, the three modes controlling reticle choice, reticle colour and then zeroing. Because the reticle is digital and displayed in the same way as the image, its precise position

is not necessarily central on the screen and is what was known in the optical days as 'moving reticle', rather than the 'moving image' we see 99 per cent of the time on regular riflescopes now. X and Y axis numbers are displayed and when zeroing, you dial the reticle towards the impact point to set the Photon up.

A big advantage is that the flip-up objective lens cap has a 2mm pinhole aperture so that, when closed, the Photon can be used very effectively in daylight. This makes zeroing a lot simpler as you can see everything and familiarise yourself before darkness descends. The downside to a moving reticle is that it can appear distinctly 'off-centre' and this upsets some people. Windage is rarely too far from centre but with +/-30 available in all axes, required elevation will usually site the reticle below centre. I'm sure it could go further, but it would look very strange. On my .22 rimfire zeroed at 60 yards, it was set at -22; on my .17 HMR it was at -29 with 20gr XTP ammo, but sadly it was not able to zero with the 17gr V-max, which shoot 3" lower at 100 yards. Zeroing on the .223 had it set at -11, which was more than acceptable. So I clearly tested it on three rifles and although issues were found with zero, I would happily say that if you buy it for one rifle, adjustable mounts will solve these problems.

PRICES...

Yukon Photon XT 6.5x50,
£399.95

Pulsar X850 Illuminator,
£129.99

Nightmaster 800 IR kit,
£189.95

LEFT: One dial/button combination controls everything

BELOW: Standard scope rings make mounting the Photon very simple



The Photon then remained long term on the .223 Remington as it is my most dependable gun for pest control. A 6" black 'shoot 'n' see' style target or larger was ideal to aim at on a white background in daylight; quartering the circle gave good enough point of aim at 100m with the 6.5x magnification. I did some box testing to check the actual click value and 20 'clicks' gave me an average group centre-to-centre change of 355mm. This equates to 17.75mm per click at 100m and using this value has not let me down so far, and although that sounds like quite a lot, is smaller than the aiming error at 6.5x magnification generally. On a head-shot rabbit, that is quite large, but a maximum zero error with 'perfect ammunition' and shooting can be no less precise than half of one click and never caused a problem for me.

The reticle choices were quite interesting as two of them offer longer range aim-off marks on the lower stadia, as well as the usual mildot offering. Given time and practice, these will make good aim-off marks when you get to know the optic and judge the range of similarly sized quarry against the reticle subtensions. Colour options on the reticle were good; I often found myself swapping between red and white depending on the conditions – just make very sure you don't inadvertently alter your zero settings as you adjust the rotary dial and press the centre button.

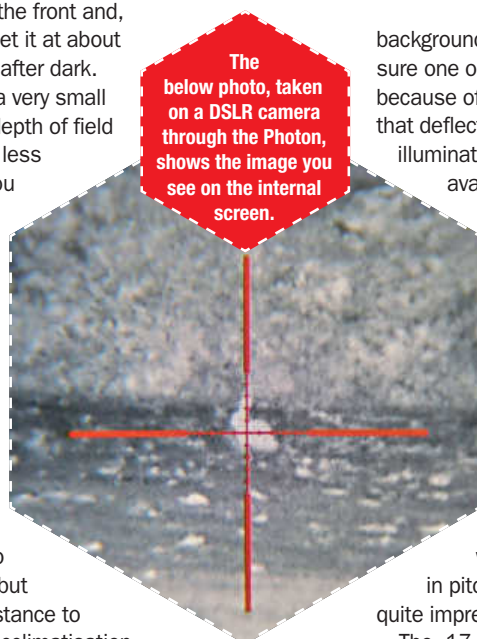
Image focus is set at the front and, after daylight zeroing, I set it at about 100 yards and went out after dark. Like any optical device, a very small aperture increases the depth of field and hence makes focus less finicky. But after dark, you need all the light you can get, so flick it open. There is, of course, the light we see, and the IR we don't see that the sensors depend on.

First tests on the rimfire had immediately impressed me as up to about 80 yards with the inbuilt illuminator, no rabbit escaped viewing, but after dark, assessing distance to the rabbits took a little acclimatisation and misses were still made with this somewhat range-critical calibre. The rabbits showed up as solid black silhouettes against the grassy



ABOVE: The on-board 850nm eye safe laser illuminator has three intensity settings

\\ I HAD TO REMIND MYSELF THAT I WAS WATCHING 180-YARD RABBITS IN PITCH BLACK //



The below photo, taken on a DSLR camera through the Photon, shows the image you see on the internal screen.

backgrounds of the paddock and I'm sure one or two also got missed because of intervening grassy stalks that deflected bullets. With the illuminator on, visibility was easily available to the modestly advertised 150m and further, depending on ambient light and moon conditions. The image is quite grainy and after the relative clarity of daylight/pinhole aperture use was obviously less clear, but I had to keep flipping my eyes away from the scope to remind myself that I was

watching 180-yard rabbits in pitch black for £400. Hmm, quite impressive.

The .17 HMR experiment failed badly due to the zeroing problems and yet another ammunition stoppage, so I quickly went to 'stage three' with the .223 and have not looked back. I have

added both a Pulsar X850 illuminator to the right-hand side Picatinny rail and Nightmaster 800IR on top to push the limits and research more. The X850 gives IR light similar to the on-board unit and it seems softer in use, slightly enlarging the field of view depending on focal setting but, generally, enhancing everything. The NM800 is a far harsher IR light and the 'ribs' across the sensor's LED are visible quite distinctly through the Photon, but with a sharper focus. At longer ranges, it did aid more precision shot placement, but the lines across the view could be a little annoying. I would choose the former on a .22 rimfire, the latter on a centrefire.

The left side dial also controls brightness and works silently, but it also has automatic settings and when illuminators are switched on and off, can sometimes overcompensate for them so their effect is not noticeable in mid light conditions, only when it is really dark. In moonlight from an

elevated position, I could see *and* shoot rabbits beyond 250 yards in short grass. But I know my land and its native species; I do not have any hares and although their general demeanour and motion separate them from rabbits quite easily, when spotting dark, moving blobs, it is by no means certain. The IR illuminators immediately pick up/create bright eye shine and it didn't seem to worry my locals, but foxes can be a little more wily. Over grasslands and known areas with little cover, I would confidently see, identify and shoot a fox but again, body size, shape and motion are critical and no night vision is perfect; a fox and a cat can be very dangerously close in visual terms.

Foliage and backgrounds stood out well and you rarely felt lost in your environment, but depth of field is tight. I shot from tall Quadpods a lot as it allowed both hands to operate all controls; it is quite a reach to the image focus. Daytime use was excellent and I would happily equip a .22 rimfire solely with the Photon, but it struggles when the rabbits nestle at the base of hedges in daylight and their natural colour really blends in.

It has a three-year warranty and is rated for large-calibre use. I would personally cut a larger air hole out of the eyepiece rubber extender, too, as with prolonged viewing, the heat from your own skin can cause the ocular lens to steam up and it takes a while to realise that is the only reason your image is going further out of focus. Display resolution of 640 x 480 with a LCD display and camera resolution of 656 x 492 cuts a good compromise, but, taking a 60-yard rabbit as an example, I was aiming for frontal body/chest shots as the head was not clean enough in focus with the reticle to ensure perfect aim. But, this is a £400 unit and although the picture is a bit nicer at 10 times that price, at moderate ranges for a functional workman's tool I loved the Photon, especially on the less range-sensitive calibres.

Although I have now had the scope for some time, one statement continues to ring true: this scope allows me to do more effective pest control shooting at a convenient time of day or night, all winter, than any other optic I have ever owned.

If you wish, you can record the action from the 'video out' feed and up to

five hours use is available from the twin AAs. Changing them – more than likely in the dark – is easy enough, but identifying the correct polarity requires a good memory or flicking on a torch; it would have been nice to have a tactile polarity indicator. Extra illuminators do add bulk, but what has pleased me is the moderate size of the unit compared to the functional use and capability it provides along with shooter comfort, either prone or standing. At 620g with five hours of battery life, it makes for a good spotter, too! **RS**

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



- ◆ 60mm eye relief
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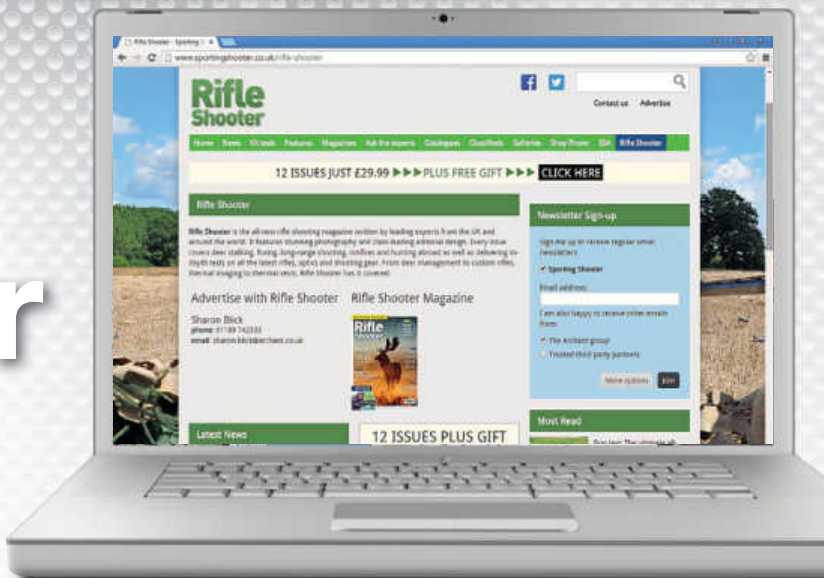
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THE SHAME GAME

The social media frenzy surrounding the 'Cecil' case is just one example of the seemingly 'acceptable' public shaming and defiling that digital platforms facilitate

So Walter Palmer wasn't quite as guilty as social media led us to believe, according to Zimbabwe's authorities. And with the dentist's paperwork all squared away and the hunt seemingly lawful, the question is this: how could the guide, Theo Bronkhurst, be guilty of failing to prevent an illegal hunt if the hunt was not illegal?

It's not a great outcome for the case at present, but guilty or not – and it increasingly looks like 'not' – there is one thing for certain. Palmer and Bronkhurst have been personally and professionally destroyed by people who, in many cases, have no understanding of hunting, no respect for the facts of the case, and no chance of ever being held accountable for their own actions.

I very much doubt whether any responsible hunter on the planet would defend anybody who had wilfully participated in an unlawful trophy hunt. Most of us who hunt or stalk are active conservationists and put animal welfare and hunting ethics at the top of the agenda. But of course, Palmer was 'tried and

convicted' of the most heinous crimes before any court had the chance to even consider the evidence.

What Palmer was actually most 'guilty' of was being involved in a sport that divides opinion in the wider world. And while many of us have our own moral or ethical 'red lines' – be it trophy hunting, big-game hunting or deer stalking – the truth is, we are all part of the shooting and hunting community. And doesn't that make us all potential targets for Ricky Gervais and his ill-informed ilk?

Palmer was a soft target, too, because in the howling storm of self-righteousness that swamped Twitter and Facebook, how could anybody stand against that global digital lynch mob? And who cares if a litany of untruths or vile threats are issued as fact or justice, because publishing something online has no consequences, right?

That is something we might all do well to remember. Because, while the law is very clear on standards of behaviour for those who have the privilege of holding FACs, it is not

renowned for the stout defence of those whose reputations are digitally defiled.

To my mind, the worst blood sport on our planet right now seems to be the public shaming and humiliation that Twitter and Facebook seem to revel in. The feeding frenzies that are whipped up have no conscience – and do not seem to limit themselves to the initial subject of the tirade. A bit of googling or Facebook-surfing might throw up some family and friends – maybe even an address or two... they're all guilty by association, right? They are all 'fair game'.

Social media has many wonderful attributes. The ability to totally annihilate somebody's reputation – somebody's life – is not one of them. Sadly, it seems that it is a weapon that is being wielded ever more readily by certain factions of society. The kind that like to turn up at fox hunts wearing ski masks. It is a form of terrorism, pure and simple.

And, as for the truth? Why let that get in the way... **RS**

The views of the author are his/her own and do not necessarily represent the views of the magazine.

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